





*X.B. C. 11*

The Society of Saint Francis  
10 Halcrow Street  
Stepney  
London E1 2EP  
Telephone: 01-247 6233





OLD TESTAMENT PROPHETS.



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# Old Testament Prophets

A STUDY IN PERSONALITY

BY

W. A. C. ALLEN.

CAMBRIDGE :

W. HEFFER & SONS LTD.

1919.



## PREFACE.

IN this volume no claim is made that the ideas suggested are the result of original research. On the contrary, I have attempted only to follow in the footsteps of those who have devoted a life-work to the investigation of the numerous problems which the subject of our Bible presents to us. My thanks are especially due to Professor A. H. Sayce, who several years ago read through part of the MS., and made some valuable suggestions, and upon whose works a great many of the ideas contained in the book are based ; to Dr. T. G. Pinches, for permission to incorporate his solution of the difficulties connected with the last campaign of Sennacherib ; to Messrs. Macmillan and Co., Ltd., for permission to reprint a portion of Sennacherib's inscription, taken from Professor McCurdy's "History, Prophecy, and the Monuments" ; to Messrs. Methuen and Co., Ltd., publishers, and to Mr. F. W. Bain, the author of "In the Great God's Hair," for allowing me to print a passage taken from the preface of this book ; and to Messrs. T. and T. Clark, for permission to copy from Dr. Hastings' "Dictionary of the Bible" two short extracts from the Babylonian hymn which describes the descent of Ishtar into Hades.

APRIL 25, 1919.





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## INTRODUCTION.

THIS volume is intended to serve as a study of the religion of the Hebrew people during the period which reaches from the call of Abraham down to the destruction of Jerusalem by Nebuchadrezzar in 586 B.C. The materials for such a study are to be found chiefly in the pages of our Bible, in the books which begin with Genesis and end with that of the prophet Ezekiel, whilst much important light is thrown upon these materials by the historical records of Babylonia and of Egypt, of which so great an abundance have come to light during the last half-century.

Before, however, proceeding directly to our task, a few introductory words on the subject of religion in general may not be out of place. The study of religion is at once the most interesting and the most important to which human beings can apply themselves, the most interesting because it is a subject to which every human being without exception has given some thought, and upon which he has come to some conclusion, the most important because it reaches down to the bed-rock of our nature, touching the most vital points of our being. Religion might perhaps be defined as "man's recognition of his dependence upon higher powers." Every man, we know, in some degree or other, recognises such dependence. Whether he be an unclothed savage hunting his game and spearing his fish in the midst of the virgin forest, or whether he be the modern business or professional man, surrounded by every convenience

which science can devise, he knows that there are large tracts of his life which lie outside his own control, regions over which all his skill and all his energy can never make him complete master. Who are the Person or Persons who exert so vast an influence over all human affairs? What is their character? What their manner of dealing with men? What behaviour do they expect from us in return? In the answer which he gives to these questions a man's religion is to be found. The answers given by each must be founded upon the man's own experience: these answers must grow and change with the growth and change of that experience: they must be as numerous as are the individuals who together compose the race of men. Hence we find, as we should expect to find, that no two men's religions are, or ever have been, exactly alike. To our limited minds the variations may well appear infinite in number. Yet behind all these variations it is possible to observe, upon closer inspection, some underlying unities. Wherever a community of men is gathered together, knit by common ties, united by similar traditions, all acknowledging obedience to the same sovereign authority, whatever form such a community may take, tribe, city-state, or kingdom numbering its millions of inhabitants, there a common type of religion is to be found. If any individual belonging to such a community were to be questioned as to the religion which he held, his answer would be found in many points, and those the most fundamental, to be the same as that of his fellows. Upon this fundamental basis, held in common by most members of the community, every member would build the variations suggested by his own experience. Hence we are able to speak not only of individual, but of tribal



and national religions. The reasons for such a state of affairs are two-fold. In the first place, all members of such a community must live under somewhat similar conditions ; and the experience of all being in many points the same, their interpretation of that experience would naturally tend to be thrown into the same shape. But a far more important reason than this is to be found. In almost every case national religions have been moulded and given fixity of shape by the work of outstanding men, the great religious leaders who have devoted their lives to this purpose. The majority of men, it is well known, are unable to give clear expression to their religious ideas. Experiences are common to all ; the wish to interpret these experiences is likewise common ; but the power to find a satisfactory interpretation is rare. Therefore when there appears a man who possesses a deeper feeling, a keener insight, a clearer power of expression than his fellows, such a man is able to supply the explanation after which others have felt themselves to be groping. Those who listen to his words feel that their darkness is being removed : he is hailed as a seer, a man of genius, a prophet : his teaching becomes authoritative. When once the teaching of such a man has become widely accepted amongst any people, the religion of that people is given a stamp which it will never lose altogether. Every soul who is in quest of information will seek first of all in the writings or sayings of the prophet. Only in so far as these appear deficient will he supplement them by further ideas of his own. Hence, casting our eyes back upon the ancient world, we see that in almost every case, where a strong, enduring national religion was found, such a religion originated from the work of great leaders ; and even

where the names and labours of such leaders have been lost in antiquity, their existence may yet be suspected in order to account for the results which are left behind.

Such is the work of the prophets and preachers of religion, the interpretation of common experiences, the giving to religious feeling a clear outline, and a lasting faith. But we know that there is also another side to religion, and that a side which can never be forgotten. All religions which have been thrown into coherent form possess not only a faith which can be enshrined in creeds, which can be explained and commentated upon, they possess also institutions. Temples and services, priests and ceremonies, these we know to be almost as inseparable from any religion as the faith itself. They are the outward expression which that faith takes to itself, the clothing in which it is wrapped. They serve at once as a proof and a reminder to the people of the faith which they are taught to believe. No religion can exist long which does not possess some kind of temple, some form of worship. Wherever a number of people hold any beliefs in common, there it is necessary for them to meet together in order to express the emotions consequent upon those beliefs, to remind themselves of, and to strengthen themselves in their faith. Such gatherings are universal. When a form of religion is new they are usually small, and conducted in a simple manner. As the number of a community which holds common beliefs increases, as their wealth becomes greater, their faith more venerated, so the gatherings tend to become more elaborate. A prescribed mode of ceremony is adopted ; some members of the community are set aside in order to devote themselves entirely to the arranging of such ceremonies ; splendid buildings

are erected in which the gatherings may be held. The priesthoods and temples thus founded are enriched by the offerings of the faithful ; kings, forward in displaying their piety, shower their gifts upon them, the Church grows in wealth, in strength, and in confidence. Hence, looking back again upon the nations of antiquity, we find in every civilised people the Church established as a wealthy and powerful corporation, its officials enjoying the favour, and often claiming the obedience, of the reigning monarch. Such institutions possess usually a lasting power greater than that of the religious faith which they enshrine. Faith, as we have seen, is based upon experience, and experience can never remain for two instants together unchanged. As experience grows so the interpretation of it changes ; and a form of faith which once completely satisfied men's minds will, through the lapse of time, gradually cease to do so. Men begin to formulate in their own minds professions of their belief which differ widely from those officially taught. Hence arrives the cleavage so frequently to be found between a national religion which is recognised by authority, and that which the greater number of the citizens really hold. Under such circumstances the outward forms no longer correspond to the inward belief, with the result that the whole framework of society is thrown into a precarious and unstable condition. It is possible that such a condition may last a very long time. The majority of people, as we have seen, are slow to formulate their religious beliefs. Where the outward form of worship is no longer adequate to represent the stirrings of men's hearts, there a dim dissatisfaction is felt, a vague discontent is spread throughout the community. In the meanwhile the temples still stand in-

vested with that reverent respect which long ages of religious use have gained for them, the services are still thronged with worshippers, the priests still continue to give advice to the people. There is need once more of another prophet : again a great religious leader must come forward to interpret the new fields of experience, to voice the feeling of the multitude, to add a new faith on to the old. Such a prophet arising under such circumstances is almost sure to meet with opposition. His task in a civilised country, possessed of a highly organised form of religion, is far more difficult than amongst a people who have arrived at no definite conception of their faith. He has arrayed against him the powers which we style reactionary, that is the combination of all those who, either through genuine affection or through self-interest, acknowledge a deep attachment towards the old religion. The teaching of the prophet is felt by them to be subversive of the old forms. They are unable to realise that he has come " not to destroy, but to fulfil " ; and hence, through an ardent, if mistaken, zeal they attempt to overthrow the new preacher, employing all the means which lie in their power in order to compass his downfall. In such a contest the result may sometimes seem to favour the reactionary forces. The prophet may be driven into exile, he may be killed, his followers may be scattered ; but in the long run, as history shows us, the victory will always lie upon his side. If he is a true prophet, that is, if his preaching is based upon real experience, his words cannot fall to the ground wasted. In a shorter or a longer time they will be accepted, will become authoritative, will form the basis for a new mould of religious thought. The prophet himself may have passed away ; but his followers

will remain. In time his preaching will be the centre of a popular movement, against which the opposing forces, daily weakened by desertion from their own ranks, will struggle in vain. The new teaching will be accepted, a new form of religious worship will be adopted, such as may give adequate expression to the addition of faith.

By such steps is religious progress maintained. With each succeeding generation, as experience becomes richer and more varied, so should the interpretation of it given in its faith become fuller and clearer. Such we find was especially the case amongst the Hebrew people. With these general remarks to help us, let us therefore proceed to examine the religious history of the Israelites.



## CHAPTER I.

### ANCIENT ISRAEL.

OUT of the dim mists of antiquity which shroud all the beginnings of our modern civilisation there loom pre-eminent the names of three great nations—Babylonia, Egypt and Israel. These played the leading part in the history of that ancient Mediterranean civilisation from which our own has after many vicissitudes been evolved. The first two of them were the guardians of an immemorial culture which is known to have been flourishing five thousand years before the beginning of our present era ; and although they lacked the mechanical devices upon which we so greatly pride ourselves, and the exact knowledge of the processes of the universe which constitutes modern science, yet when compared with the peoples around them and the darkness of the ages they had left behind, the light of their culture and intelligence must have shone quite as brilliantly as does that of twentieth century Europe. With just pride may Nebuchadrezzar have exclaimed: “ Is not this great Babylon, which I have built ? ” as he looked round upon his noble city with its palaces and gardens, its museums and art-galleries.

Yet the beauty and civilisation of Babylon, as of its rival, ancient Egypt, have disappeared for ever. The art and literature, the thoughts and ideas of these precursors of ours, have now to be dug up in dismembered fragments from ruined temples on the banks of the Nile,

from city mounds on the Mesopotamian plain. Beside these two great nations the third cited above appears merely as a late offspring, numerically insignificant, and inferior in every sort of culture. Before Abraham is said to have left his ancestral home in Ur of the Chaldees, not far from the right bank of the great river Euphrates, the country, from which he was departing, could boast a history of great kings and their mighty deeds and conquests, stretching far back into the dim, unknown past. But this third nation of beginnings so slight and insignificant is the one which has survived. As a nation, although scattered throughout the earth, its component parts to be found in every land, making use of every language, it still retains its ties of nationality as closely bound as ever ; but more important than mere survival is the fact, that whilst the thoughts of Babylon and Egypt are even now accessible only to the learned, Israel's ancient literature has remained throughout the ages an inspiring force to many nations, and not least to the English-speaking race, which may be said indeed almost to have appropriated the Bible as though it were a product of its own special genius. The reason for the exertion of this influence is to be found in the marked individuality of the nation, as shown in the uniqueness of its outlook upon life, an individuality fostered and hardened by the vicissitudes through which in its youth it was to pass. From the very first Israel well deserved its reputation of being a stiff-necked race ; the course of its early history engendered within it a strong moral fibre, a marvellous power of resistance to outside influence, of clinging to its own peculiar ideals, which has enabled it to survive and to wield an influence in every period of history, whilst other nations of softer

calibre, though of more promising appearance, have greedily imbibed the thoughts and ideals of foreigners, have lost what individuality they once possessed, and disappeared engulfed in the stream of the ages. The Israelites themselves attributed this characteristic to the peculiar circumstances under which their race was welded into a nation, possessed of a national pride and a national self-consciousness; indeed, without taking these circumstances into account to assign causes for the phenomenon would be an impossible task. And how marvellously strange that history was! At the beginning we find a small Nomadic tribe, in nearly every respect similar to the Arab tribes which still haunt those regions of Western Asia. Near to the outskirts of Babylonian civilisation this tribe, under the leadership of the patriarch Abraham, wandered along the highways of trade and commerce in company doubtless with numerous bands of other sons of the desert, in a similar condition to themselves. The ordinary reader of the Bible has probably come to regard Abraham as in some ways a unique and marvellous figure standing out against a background admirably conceived like a piece of theatrical scenery for the purpose of emphasising the central personage. A picture the exact reverse of this must be conjured up if we would wish to have any idea of the truth. Abraham and his followers, to the eye of the spectator, would appear but as one insignificant item amidst the throng of jostling humanity, of caravans laden with merchandise, of semi-barbarous tribes ever on the move up and down, backwards and forwards, which made up the restless life of those old days in the regions where civilisation, with its walled cities, its temples, its cultivated fields, and skilfully

engineered canals, was passing by slow gradations into the great expanse of the sandy desert. The first period of the Hebrew wanderings came to an end with the arrival in Palestine. There upon the great rocky limestone ridge which forms the main part of that country, Abraham wandered, pitching his tents wherever water could be found for his flocks, his sheep and oxen and asses, which provided him with all the means of transit and of sustenance. Like the modern Bedouin, headed by their powerful Sheikhs, the Hebrews wandered in the open tracts of country, more or less avoiding the vicinity of towns or cultivated land. For the land of Palestine was at that time by no means given over to a state of natural wildness. When the Tel-El-Amarna letters were written to Amenophis III. and Amenophis IV., kings of Egypt, the Canaanite inhabitants were possessed of a high civilisation, Babylonian letters and literature were in common vogue, and libraries were probably to be found in the more important cities. This, it is true, was in the 15th century B.C., about 800 years after the days of Abraham; but there is plenty of evidence to show that things were not so very different in his time. The land was filled with cities, the civilisation of many of which had existed long enough to have become extremely corrupt. If, as there is every reason to believe to be the case, the fourteenth chapter of Genesis telling of the campaign of Chedorlaomer and his vassal kings and of the subsequent dealings of Abraham with Melchizedek, king of Jerusalem, is taken from a Babylonian tablet almost contemporary with the events it narrates, then we see that these progenitors of the Hebrew race must have lived in the midst of a civilisation with which they had every chance of coming into some contact,

even of the slightest, On one occasion at least we know that such contact fell in Abraham's way. On the death of Sarah, Abraham bargained with the children of Heth, *i.e.*, the Hittites, in Hebron, towards the south of Canaan, for the possession of a piece of land and a cave in which to bury his relatives. The possibility of such a transaction shows a settled and tranquil state of society. In the manner of concluding the bargain we obtain a strikingly vivid glimpse into the typical Oriental method of doing business, which has remained practically unchanged until the present day. Ephron, the owner of the field in question, is sitting in the midst of his fellow townsmen at the gate of the city, the spot where by immemorial custom all public business was performed. On the approach of Abraham to open negotiations, he makes what sounds to us a strikingly magnanimous offer: "The field give I thee, and the cave that is therein, I give it thee: in the presence of the sons of my people give I it thee: bury thy dead." Abraham, however, knows perfectly well what this means. His reply is couched in the language of polite petition. "If thou wilt, I pray thee, hear me: I will give the price of the field: take it of me and I will bury my dead there." With a gesture of remonstrance and disdain, Ephron puts aside the notion of filthy lucre. The thought evidently causes him pain. "My Lord, hearken unto me: a piece of land worth four hundred shekels of silver, what is that betwixt me and thee? Bury therefore thy dead." The price thus delicately suggested was paid down by Abraham, and the transaction duly signed and witnessed by the assembled elders. "To the field of Ephron which was in Machpelah, the field and the cave which was therein, and all



the trees that were in the field were made sure unto Abraham for a possession in the presence of the children of Heth, before all that went in at the gate of the city." In the inclusion within this last inventory of the trees contained in the field, we may see that legal dealings at this period were matters of serious import, and that details which might cause trouble afterwards were by no means overlooked. Amidst scenes and incidents like this, varied perhaps occasionally by the exhilarating excitement of a tribal skirmish, or a daring raid, this Nomadic life in Canaan was passed ; until by a strange fortuity of circumstance the tribe, now greatly increased in wealth and numbers, found itself settled in the land of Egypt in the enjoyment of the favour and patronage of her kings. The land of Goshen, in which the Israelites were settled, was not a part of Egypt proper, that narrow strip of country lying between lofty mountains, through the midst of which the Nile flows. It lay in the Nile delta, the flat expanse of alluvial soil which inch by inch the river had pushed forward into the sea, as it steadily deposited the mud brought down from inland, and through which it now ran by means of numberless channels large and small, until emptied into the Mediterranean Sea. The prospect, a vast expanse of fertile land stretching upon every side to the horizon and intersected by these numerous brooks and rivers, must be singularly similar to that of our reclaimed fen-lands of Lincolnshire. Here the Israelites were enabled to pasture their flocks, and pursue their mode of life unmolested by the native Egyptians, These last were an agricultural people, and the science of agriculture they had brought to a high pitch of perfection. For this they were indebted to climatic conditions of singular

regularity. The river Nile rising regularly every year flooded the whole country, and retired leaving upon the fields a fertile covering of oozy mud. Hence, under the influence of the sun, whose brilliancy was seldom clouded, plentiful crops of barley and of Indian corn could be raised with ease every year. The waters of the Nile were further directed to the irrigation of the whole land by an elaborate system of canals and dykes, which ensured the drainage and fertility of the fields. A striking feature of these old Egyptians seems to have been their insularity. Unlike their rivals of Babylon and Assyria, the dominating object of whose great kings was to spread the terror of their arms and the glamour of their civilisation far and wide, the Egyptians were contented to keep themselves to themselves. When empires were acquired by them, the motive was no innate love of conquest, but the desire to emulate their more warlike neighbours; and the results of these conquests were always unstable and fleeting. The motive of rivalry could provoke outbursts of energy and enthusiasm, but could not provide the tenacity required for the obtaining of permanent results. Recalling this trait to mind it is not surprising to read (Gen. xlv.) that every shepherd was an abomination to the Egyptians. The spirit of animosity may well have been aroused by bitter experience in the past. Hordes of these Bedouins of the desert were continually in the habit of swarming over the frontier, and if they happened to be of a predatory mind, the rich cornfields of Egypt would lie completely at their mercy. The feeling of hostility must, however, largely be laid at the Egyptians' door, who by their attitude of aloofness and suspicion encouraged the Nomads to consider them as

natural enemies. In other countries, as we have seen, for instance, in Palestine, a working agreement based on a mutual understanding was tacitly acknowledged between the wandering and the stationary populations : in Egypt such was never the case. In view of this circumstance it is deemed extremely probable that Jacob's establishment in the land of Goshen took place under the Hyksos or Shepherd Kings of Egypt. About 2,000 years before the beginning of our own era, under the pressure of unknown external circumstances, there took place an unprecedented invasion of Asiatic Nomads into Egypt. These, swarming over the whole land, threatened the entire disintegration of the ancient civilisation, The conquerors, however, showed themselves adaptable to outside influence, assimilated greedily the learning of Egypt, and produced some excellent kings—the Hyksos, who ruled the land in peace and prosperity for some five hundred years. By the end of this time the constitutions of the conquerors had been undermined by alien luxury, and their hardy self-dependence acquired in the desert had degenerated into effeminate incapacity : the native spirit of independence had revived in proportion as the ruling faction fell into decadence, and a sanguinary struggle was the result, at the conclusion of which the aliens were driven *en masse* out of the country. If it was under one of these so-called shepherd kings that Joseph came into favour, the subsequent change of attitude on the part of the Egyptian authorities towards the Israelites would be amply explained. The evidence for the deciding of this question must be looked for outside the Bible. The writers, who describe for us the dealings of the Israelites with Egypt, are obviously

very uncertain on historical questions of this sort ; indeed, they do not even tell the individual names of the Pharaohs whom they mention. The Pharaoh of the oppression was the famous Rameses II. of the nineteenth dynasty, who ruled during the thirteenth century B.C. One of the best known of Egyptian monarchs, he prosecuted many foreign wars, and enriched the country by numerous temples and public works, for the erection of which labour was no doubt exacted from many other unfortunates besides the Israelites. The exodus took place under his son Mineptah, at a period when the country was impoverished and enfeebled by the extravagances of the late ruler.

This exodus might never have taken place, and the history of the Jews never have needed to be written, but for the commanding personality of one great man. It was Moses who converted a mob of slaves, dejected by misfortune, without hope and without ideals, into an alert, enthusiastic nation, whose keenness the obstacles placed in their way by human opposition only tended to sharpen. Wielding the name of the God of their fathers, the God of Abraham, of Isaac and of Jacob, Moses drew their attention towards that land from which many generations since they had departed, and inspired within them the sure hope of return. Imbued with this great idea, all impediments were as nothing to the Israelites, and the land of their slavery was left once for all behind them. Arrived at the borders of Egypt an impassable object seemed to bar their way. In front lay the waters of the Red Sea, whilst in the rear the chariots of Pharaoh were rapidly approaching. From this harassing situation the Israelites were relieved

by a most striking turn of fortune. A strong wind blowing upon the shallow waters at the northern end of the gulf drove back the sea and afforded a safe passage across for the emigrants. Their enemies, attempting to make use of the same advantage, were caught by the returning waters and overwhelmed before they were able to extricate themselves. This event was ever looked back upon by the people of Israel as a turning point in their history, and was regarded by them with feelings of the deepest gratitude. As at a crucial point in the history of our own country, "God blew with His winds and they were scattered," so on this memorable day it was felt by the Israelites that for the sake of His chosen people "He caused the sea to go back by a strong east wind all the night."

The capability of Moses was shown in that he was able not only to inspire an enterprise, but to carry it through to the end. Once the original excitement was over, and the dreary outline of life in the desert was commenced, a life to which the Israelites had been for many generations strangers, the hope of the promised land began to grow dim, and the difficulties which loomed ahead to become vast and terrifying. The heroic spirit of Moses remained undaunted. The rest of his life was spent in the continual effort to put new hope and energy into a dispirited multitude.

After the vicissitudes of a protracted journey, the border of the land of Canaan was reached. A small band of spies was sent in advance in order to investigate the country and to report on the best method of entering it. The tidings which they brought back were of mixed character. The land itself was everything which the imagination depicted it to be ; but the difficulties to be

overcome were appalling. "The people be strong that dwell in the land," so ran the spies' report, "and the cities are walled and very great." Great was the stir throughout the encampment on receipt of this news. Advance and retreat appeared alike impossible. Bitter taunts were hurled by the people against the leaders who had brought them into such a plight. Moses, in words of passionate rebuke, reproached the faithlessness of the people. Their God had led them safely so far; but now, he declared, His punishment would fall upon them. Not one of those who had murmured should live to see the promised land. "Your carcases shall fall in the wilderness, and all which have murmured against me." The people were cowed by their leader's severity. They determined if possible to retrieve their character and their fortune by making an immediate attack. Moses declaring that the die was cast, discountenanced any such project. In spite of his warnings the people persisted, and met with a disastrous defeat at the hands of the Amalekites and Canaanites. Then, with a broken spirit, they turned their backs upon the promised land. A new generation had to grow up inured to the hardships of the desert, fierce, keen and independent, before human energy could be generated sufficient to sweep away at one great onset all obstacles, natural as well as artificial. Moses himself never lived to see the consummation of his ideals; but he departed to his grave with the assurance that his efforts were not in vain, and that his work was at length on the point of completion.

The first resistance encountered after the invasion had once begun in earnest was that of the Ammonite monarchs, Sihon and Og, who, crossing from the Western



tableland, had established kingdoms on the east side of the river Jordan. These were rapidly crushed, and the Israelite nation in arms crossed the Jordan. Jericho was the first city to fall before their onset, and a permanent camp was established at Gilgal not far distant. As far as the actual course of the campaign can be reconstructed from the somewhat confused narratives given in our authorities, the small town of Ai was the next to fall after the invaders had suffered a slight setback. The Canaanite kings in dismay and alarm now began to take urgent measures for the defence of their country. Prior to the invasion the land of Canaan had possessed no political cohesion whatever. Each city stood alone, self-centred, and self-governed. The despotic king, owning no suzerainty save that which was imposed upon him by force, was its absolute ruler, and to him allegiance was due from the country round, whence the city drew its means of sustenance. A common danger, however, called for concerted measures. A league of five powerful kings from the southern portion of the country was formed under the leadership of Adonizedek of Jerusalem ; but the united force was completely defeated by Joshua in a pitched battle in the neighbourhood of Gibeon. A similar league of northern cities met with no better fortune, being again disastrously beaten. The Israelites had now penetrated the heart of the country, and the backbone of the native resistance was completely broken. It remained for them to secure the fruits of victory. For this end the united force broke up, the various tribes dispersing in their several directions to complete the subjugation and settlement of the land. In this effort they were not uniformly successful. At the beginning of the



campaign it had probably been the Israelites' ardent desire to exterminate utterly the inhabitants of the country, as shown in the case of the ill-fated city of Jericho. This policy was, however, in practice found impracticable, and the conquerors had to remain content with reducing the natives to slavery, making use of them as "hewers of wood and drawers of water." Many indeed of the native cities defied the utmost efforts of their assailants, remaining free and independent until a much later date. Thus Jerusalem, the strong fortress of the warlike Jebusites, remained untaken until the days of David, and the Canaanite cities in the valley of Jezreel, owing mainly to the onrush of their chariots over the plain, before which the Israelite footmen from the hills were unable to stand, for long retained their independence.

With the settlement of the country there begins the stormy, convulsive transition period of Israelitish history. A race of Nomads had to become a race of agriculturists, and the process was no easy one. Indeed, at times it must have seemed as though complete national disintegration would be the inevitable outcome. Scattered broadcast over the land, engaged in the tilling of the fields, in the cultivation of the vine, the fig-tree, and the olive, processes in which was badly needed all the instruction which the subjugated inhabitants could afford them, the old warlike spirit of unity and self-reliance was completely lost, and Israel became an easy prey to foreign invaders. The Moabites, the northern Canaanites, the wild Midianite hordes, and the people of Ammon were amongst those who during this period oppressed Israel. But the nation still possessed strength of backbone sufficient to resist the strain. In every case

a man was produced of ability and energy sufficient to rally his disheartened fellow-countrymen and beat back the invaders. This champion, relying on the prestige thus acquired, seems to have exercised for the rest of his life-time, in the character of judge, a sort of sovereign authority, probably of but local extent. In this way a precarious unity and stability was retained during the period of the Judges. The last and greatest of these oppressions under which Israel suffered, and that which in consequence produced the strongest and most lasting reaction, was that of the Philistines. This military people, coming up from their cities in the plain bordering on the Mediterranean Sea, established garrison forts, forming a kind of block-house system, throughout the land of Israel, from which to dominate the unoffending inhabitants. That this was a permanent state of affairs can be deduced with practical certainty from the subsequent narrative. At a later time Jonathan surprised and captured one of these standing fortresses, whereupon the Philistines immediately dispatched a strong punitive force, greatly to the dismay of the inhabitants, whose one desire was to avoid drawing attention upon themselves. The people, we read (I. Sam. xiii. 6) hid themselves in caves, and in thickets, and in rocks, and in cisterns ; whilst some of the Hebrews had gone over Jordan to the land of Gad and Gilead. Such a situation is in many respects similar to that maintained upon our own Indian frontier. From this humiliating position the people were relieved mainly through the influence of Samuel.

The childhood of this great man was spent in the tabernacle of Shiloh, in attendance upon the aged priest Eli. Whilst yet a youth Samuel received a divine message to the effect that God's punishment was about

to fall upon the house of Eli. By the fulfilment of this prediction, when the two sons of Eli were killed in battle, and the Israelitish host routed by the Philistines, the reputation of Samuel was established. He was recognised far and wide as a prophet or seer of God, and grew to wield sovereign authority as judge of the people. United once more, and encouraged by his influence, the Israelites ventured against the Philistines and defeated them. The enemy withdrew for a time, and peace was restored within the land. Probably this relief was only temporary, and within some years fresh attacks were being made. Whether for this or other causes, dissatisfaction with the rule of Samuel and his sons, whom he had associated with himself in the judgeship, began to spread through the country. The people demanded a king like the nations around them. They saw the advantages of an established government based upon hereditary right, which would never fail to provide them with a leader for all emergencies. Samuel could see in this demand only an act of rebellion against their God, and of ingratitude towards himself. He points out the evils towards which a despotism handed down from father to son would lean. In a later speech, ringing with dignity and pathos, the aged prophet and judge reminds them of the integrity of his rule. "Behold the king walketh before you, and I am old and grey-headed. Whose ox have I taken? Whose ass have I taken? Whom have I defrauded? Whom have I oppressed?" In consenting to the people's wishes he reminds them that although they have shown a lack of confidence in their God in not trusting in Him to provide leaders when necessary, yet if they will serve Him truly the results may not be altogether evil.

The man selected by Samuel to be the first to undertake the onerous duties of the kingship was not in every respect successful. Saul was no doubt chosen on account of his military prowess and majestic presence. A man of intrepid courage and, as far as could be seen, of sterling character, he was eminently suited to be the leader of a forlorn hope, yet was lacking in those greater, if more subtle, qualities which go to the making of a first-rate king. He possessed none of that personal magnetism which could inspire his followers with an unflagging devotion, and his administrative capacities were far below those required for the safe guidance of a kingdom. For the king appointed in these times of stress was to be no constitutional monarch; it was his part not to observe, but to make laws and regulations. The state was centred in him as the life of a modern battleship is centred in its captain. At his word it went out to war, and at his word returned. He was responsible for the whole maintenance of order, and the whole machinery of justice, in respect to the latter standing as the final court of appeal. The only pressure which could be brought to bear upon him was that exerted by the personal influence of his advisers. A king, invested with such functions, in a time of the most imminent peril and stress, who was unable to attach to himself the enthusiastic devotion of his subjects, was foredoomed to failure.

In his earliest onslaughts upon the Philistines Saul was successful, and the land was largely relieved of its burden. But in the long and harassing warfare which followed, his weaknesses became more and more apparent. The tall figure of their king lost, bit by bit, its hold upon the popular imagination, which became in turn centred upon the person of a young man of engaging character,

and distinguished ability. David, owing to the romantic exploits with which he was credited, became the darling of the people, and jealousy of this upstart clouded the closing years of Saul's life. In a final effort to retrieve his fortunes Saul marched to attack the Philistines, who had again ground the country beneath their heel. His followers were few in number, and without either heart or hope. The result was a disastrous defeat upon the slopes of Mount Gilboa, where Saul and Jonathan, his son, met their deaths.

David had for some time past been living the precarious life of an outlaw, sojourning now in the southern parts of Judea, now amongst Saul's enemies, the Philistines. On news of the disaster he was enthusiastically welcomed by the people of Judah, and made their king in the ancient city of Hebron. Saul's eldest surviving son, Ishbaal (or Ishbosheth, as the name became transfigured in later days), retreated beyond Jordan, where for some time he maintained the semblance of a kingdom. The incompetency of Ishbaal soon determined his fate. He was murdered by his servants, who thereupon resorted to David at Hebron. The collapse of this last vestige of resistance confirmed the vacillating tribes of the North, who, uncertain hitherto upon which side to rely, now swore final allegiance to the new ruler. In this way David became monarch of the united kingdom, and at once began to concert measures against the arch-enemy. The Philistines, scenting the danger, dispatched yet another army, but were utterly routed, and their power over Israel broken for ever. This was the beginning of Israel's glorious career of expansion and conquest. The national energy hitherto pent within confined limits now welled forth, engulfing

beneath its flood every neighbouring people. The almost impregnable fortress of Jerusalem was stormed and wrested from the Jebusites to become the permanent capital of the Judean kingdom; the tables were completely turned upon the once dreaded Philistines, who became subject to their former victims; Zobah, Damascus and the confederate Syrian cities of the North-East fell before the storm; and Israel's suzerainty was established over the kindred nations of Ammon, Edom, and Moab. The empire thus auspiciously founded was not destined to be long-lived. In the succeeding reign of Solomon the subject peoples began to grow restless, and the glory of Israel to wane. With the split between the Northern and Southern kingdoms all hope of a permanent overlordship vanished, and the rival nations of Israel and Judah took their natural place as drops in the troubled sea of Oriental politics, where behind a shifting, bickering mob of small and mutually jealous states there loomed up vast and terrible the crushing power of Assyria.

In Israel's history from the earliest times there was thus a chain of unusual events and startling vicissitudes amply sufficient to differentiate her from the common run of kindred peoples, and to provide her with her peculiar, her unique outlook upon life.

Let us now attempt to discover what was the nature of this outlook. Israel believed herself to possess in a special pre-eminent sense an invincible guardian and protector, the Lord Jehovah, or Yahweh, as the name should more correctly be pronounced, the Eternal, Which is, and Which was, and Which is to come.

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NOTE.—The proper name "Yahweh" is usually translated "The Lord" in the Authorised and Revised Versions, thus obscuring its personal meaning.



In the name bestowed upon their deity is to be found perhaps the only sign of an imaginative or mystical strain in the Hebrew mind. Whilst other peoples found in the sights and wonders of the world around them themes upon which the imaginative faculties might play ; whilst from the growth and death of vegetation, the waxing and waning of the moon, the uncertainties which beset human existence, they constructed stories of the life and death of the ever-living gods, regarding the universe in that kaleidoscopic manner in which facts cease to be facts, and all things melt into a glamour of the imagination, a way of looking at things which reached its culmination in the Hindu genius, the Israelites were content to record in the name of their God the fact that such a world of experience and ideas did exist.

The name, " I am that I am," as it is translated in our Bible, seems to indicate permanence in the midst of change, the thought of one who abides whilst all things pass away, a thought strikingly expressed by the Psalmist of a later date. " They shall perish ; but Thou shalt endure. They all shall wax old as doth a garment ; as a vesture shalt Thou change them, and they shall be changed. But Thou art the same, and Thy years shall not fail." Yahweh was the God of the Patriarchs, who had appeared to and conversed with Abraham, who had wrought wonders in the land of Egypt, and overthrown Pharaoh and his chariots in the Red Sea, who had raised up David His servant to bestow peace and prosperity upon Israel. He was not only connected with His chosen people, He was also the ruler and judge of all the earth. For a people of limited outlook and no scientific knowledge to hold these two notions side by side was the most natural thing in the world. The inherent diffi-



culties contained in the coupling of these two ideas which must be manifest, when the matter is looked at from a wide and critical standpoint, could never have occurred to them, any more than it has occurred to numbers of enthusiasts and patriots in more enlightened ages. Nelson's famous prayer breathes precisely the same spirit as that of the ancient Hebrews, a spirit of courage and confidence which has always been the precursor of victory.

But Yahweh was not only Israel's great leader to inspire her warriors to conquest, and to hurl down her enemies before her : His relations with the nation were far more intimate than that. His piercing eye was upon every detail of the national life ; beneath His gaze every Israelite lived and moved ; all things that were done were done in His sight. And Yahweh was a just God and a merciful : the practice of justice and mercy was accordingly the minimum of His demands upon His subjects. For Israel passing through the mill of privation and degradation had learnt something of that pity, which has ever afterwards been coupled with the epithet divine. " Remember that thou wast a bond-servant in the land of Egypt " is the oft-repeated exhortation of the book of Deuteronomy, a work written during the period of the kings, but whose exact date is difficult to determine. " Love ye therefore the stranger : for ye were strangers in the land of Egypt." In the earliest legislation that is given in the so-called book of the Covenant, Ex. xx-xxiii., we find the same spirit, " A stranger shalt thou not wrong, neither shalt thou oppress him ; for ye were strangers in the land of Egypt." An Israelite's relations with his fellows were to be those of the strictest justice, " an eye for an eye, a tooth for a tooth," a justice, the harshness of which was, however,

to be softened by deeds of mutual forbearance and sympathy. "If thou lend money to any of my people with thee that is poor thou shalt not be to him as a creditor. If thou at all take thy neighbour's garment to pledge thou shalt restore it to him before the sun goes down, for that is his only covering." Yahweh's justice is shown in that He is ever ready to hear the cry of the oppressed and to punish the wicked. It was He, who in old days had destroyed the cities of Sodom and Gomorrah for their iniquity. His punishments fell with unerring certainty upon rich and poor alike, His own signal favourites had no exemption. Of the man after God's own heart we are told in words of impressive simplicity, "Now the thing that David had done displeased Yahweh." If it be said that Israel's genius was pre-eminently that of religion, the words must be understood to mean that this conception of Yahweh, of His goodness to the nation in the past, of His demands made upon His people in the present, was woven into the very texture of the true Israelite's nature; that it inspired his every thought and moulded his every ideal. The author of the Annals of David's court whose work embraces II. Sam. ix.-xx., and I. Kings i. and ii. cannot be said to be predominantly a religious writer. He is an entertaining historian, possessing a thorough acquaintance with the events he is describing, and a marvellous power of depicting men and character. His genius is of quite a secular order, and yet, as in the last quotation given above, the thought of Yahweh is to him one upon which the whole basis of the Israelite state and society rests. One further characteristic of Yahweh remains to be mentioned. He is essentially a jealous God. On the part of His people He demands an unwavering allegiance, an

unswerving loyalty. "I am Yahweh thy God," so runs the first note of those early commandments, of the Mosaic authorship of which no doubts need be entertained, "Thou shalt have none other Gods beside Me."

But how were the people to be convinced of Yahweh's continual presence amongst them? In what shape or form did they think of Him? And how were they to know what at any moment was His divine will? In the earliest days the naive conception handed down to us in the old documents of the Pentateuch was that God used at times to walk the earth in the shape of a man. As such He appeared and talked with Abraham, partook of food in his company and made him the recipient of the promises for the future of his race. Many critics in discussing the eighteenth chapter of Genesis, in which God appears to Abraham and warns him of the impending doom of the cities of the plain, endeavour to find a radical difference between the God who walks and talks with Abraham, and He of whom the Patriarch says, "Shall not the Judge of all the earth do right?" The attempt is quite unnecessary: for the contradiction does not really exist. Mr. Andrew Lang, in his book on the "Making of Religion," has accumulated instances of similar notions held by races in a primitive stage of culture, to which the reader may, if he wishes, refer. But even without this evidence it is obvious that nothing could be more natural to a primitive mind than to invest the maker and ruler of the world with all the attributes and passions of man. The average man has only to recall his own childhood in order to endorse the extreme probability of this conception: to many men the ideas which they still hold in spite of maturer age, will be sufficient to produce conviction.

In the stories of Abraham it is not derogatory to God's dignity as ruler of the universe to appear as man, neither is it an act of condescension on His part ; it is simply the most natural and obvious thing in the world.

The stories of those early days, of God's promises made to their forefathers in the land of Canaan, remained to Israel as a precious inheritance through all the time of trouble and degradation which followed.

It is possible, though we cannot be certain on the point, that documents dating from patriarchal times may have been handed down through generations : far more probable it is that these tales and promises were enshrined in the tenacious memory of a people, to whom literature was largely unknown, and that the stories of olden times, enhanced in contrast to the misery of the present, were handed down unchanged from father to son. In passages such as Gen. xiv., where an ancient document has obviously been used, it is more likely to have been found after the entry into Canaan, than to have been preserved in the possession of the Israelites themselves.

By the time of Moses the hope inspired by the ancient promises had almost died away : it was his part to rekindle the flame and re-invigorate religious hope. To him must be ascribed the re-foundation of Israel's national religion ; in all probability it was he who gave to Israel's protector the name of Yahweh. It is true indeed that in the ancient documents of the Pentateuch there are two conflicting accounts. Both are equally explicit. The one (Gen. iii. 26) states that in days even before the flood, " men began to call upon the name of Yahweh." The other tells (Ex. iii. 14) that at Mosès' request the divine name was first revealed to him.

"Yahweh, the God of your fathers hath sent me unto you ; this is My name for ever." The priestly writer, whose work written centuries later forms so bulky a part of the Pentateuch, and the separation of which from the earlier strands of narrative is part of the arduous task laid upon Biblical scholars, unhesitatingly accepts the second of these two traditions. "I am Yahweh," are the words uttered to Moses, "and I appeared unto Abraham, unto Isaac, and unto Jacob as El Shaddai, but by My name Yahweh I was not known to them." (Ex. vi. 3.) El Shaddai, God Almighty, was a fitting designation for the God worshipped in the integrity of their hearts by Abraham and the primitive Hebrews. Theirs were the days of unquestioning faith, beset by no troubles or anxieties, a faith which took the universe for granted. For the God, around whom His people were to rally, and who was to lead them forth out of Egypt, some more distinct appellation was required. The deliverance from Egypt sealed firmly and for ever the compact between Yahweh and His people. The impression produced by that great event, bringing with it as it did new ideals of every kind and a new joy of life, was never effaced. "I am Yahweh thy God, who brought thee out of the land of Egypt, out of the house of bondage." In answer to this appeal the prophet of a later age could still arouse an echo of emotion in the hearts of the decadent Israelites of his day: "When Israel was a child I loved him, and brought My son out of Egypt." In later days still, days of disappointment and disillusion, the thought of the great deliverance of the past became a hope, to which God's people might cling, the hope of yet greater benefits to come.

Before entering upon the final campaign, Israel's allegiance to Yahweh was solemnly declared and ratified. On Mount Sinai, situated in all probability not on the traditional site at the south of the Isthmus now bearing that name, but somewhere in the land of Edom towards the south-east of the Dead Sea, Moses, in a scene of impressive grandeur, put before the people the fundamental demands of Yahweh upon them, in the shape of the Decalogue still possessed by us. The basis of the Hebrew state was thus firmly founded upon its relation to its deity. By a natural process all laws, which subsequently sprang into being, were attributed to Yahweh, speaking through the mouth of His servant Moses, their validity being thus secured in the surest possible manner.

But passing over the intervening period let us inquire what were the ties which bound Israel to Yahweh in the days of David and the monarchs who followed him. Yahweh might be He who had once effected a mighty deliverance ; He might have given many wise and just laws for His people's guidance ; He might be the God who overlooked Israel and demanded justice and mercy ; but something more than this was needed, if the religion of Yahweh were to retain its hold upon the people.

Memories and ideals will perhaps suffice to sustain the faith of a few gifted individuals, yet for the generality of mankind something more visible and tangible is required. Amongst the links connecting Yahweh with His followers may be first mentioned the priests and the temple services. Moses united the priesthood with his other numerous offices. The figure of Aaron appears to have been aggrandised in the work of the priestly writer ; in the older sources he appears only as



Moses' brother and companion, a quite insignificant rôle being assigned to him. Not only was Moses himself a priest, he was also the first priest and the founder of the priesthood. From him his tribe of Levi received its priestly position. In the primitive days there had been no priests properly so-called. The patriarchal head of the family was by natural right the intermediary between God and men, the recipient of all divine messages. The description of the gorgeous tabernacle erected by Moses in the wilderness appears to be apocryphal; the leader's real proceedings are portrayed in a less obtrusive passage, Ex. xxxiii. 7-11, whence we learn that he pitched the Tent of Meeting outside the camp, as a sanctuary whither those desirous to enquire of Yahweh might especially repair, and find themselves in the presence of God. Of this sanctuary Joshua was minister as Moses' subordinate, until his elevation to the leadership of Israel. After crossing the Jordan this tent must have been pitched at the permanent camp of Gilgal, and thence removed to Shiloh, where until later years it remained, its last minister being Eli, in whose family the priesthood had by this time become hereditary. The total destruction of Shiloh and its sanctuary is left to be inferred from the Biblical narrative. The priestly family is next found settled at Nob, near Jerusalem, where, owing to a supposed connivance with the outlaw David, they are all through Saul's mad jealousy slaughtered. Abiathar alone escaped to become, in company with Zadok, founder of the hereditary priesthood at Jerusalem, after David had there established his capital and the central sanctuary of his kingdom. Closely connected with the Tent of Meeting was the Ark, a wooden chest containing the stone tablets engraved by

Moses with the Ten Commandments, a piece of furniture to which the Divine presence was imagined more intensely to cling, and which in the troublous days preceding the settlement of the kingdom itself experienced much change of fortune. Removed from Shiloh by the credulity of the Israelites in order to aid them in battle it was lost to the Philistines, but was returned owing to similar credulous motives, and remained in a private house until the time of David, who, amidst great rejoicing, brought it up to Jerusalem. Permanently established in their new home; the principal duties of the priests, beside the general maintenance of the sanctuary, are seen to be of two kinds, the performance of the sacrificial ritual, and the declaring of the Divine will to perplexed enquirers. Sacrifice, as an established mode of communicating with the gods, was one of the religious inheritances which had come down to Israel out of the common background of Semitic thought, from which the earliest Hebrews had emerged. No reason for it was given or required. Through the lapse of ages it had become as necessary and inevitable as the seasons or the succession of day and night. The patriarchs had offered sacrifices as a matter of course ; and Yahweh demanded the same of their descendants.

The tabernacle, and the temple which followed it, also stood for a court of enquiry. To it were referred disputes which baffled settlement, to it the king repaired, when anxious to learn beforehand the result of his proposed campaign ; to it seekers after information of every sort were wont to go as to an infallible source of knowledge. On these occasions the priests sometimes relied upon their mother-wit, more often resort was had to the mechanical device known as Urim and Thummim, the

exact nature of which has not yet been discovered, for the ascertaining of Yahweh's decision. It is perhaps difficult for us to-day to imagine ourselves living in a state of society, in which these conditions obtained. The modern man, if he is ill, consults a doctor ; if his drains are wrong, the plumber is called in ; in every department of knowledge there are specialists armed with the most up-to-date information both ready and willing to enlighten him. In ancient societies of the East all this systematic division of labour and knowledge had no existence. The legal, medical, and general advisers of the communities were mostly private persons, magicians, or seers, who, through the exercise of wit and ability, had placed themselves in a position to be respected by their fellows, and had gained a reputation for vast, if not infallible, knowledge. Over against these there stood the central, firmly-established, officially sanctioned authority of the priesthood.

But in the possession of a temple and priests, Israel was only showing its similarity to the other nations around. The priests with their mechanical devices and their sacrifices could never have ensured a living, progressive religion. They were no doubt, like the priests of other nations, good sincere men, actuated by the highest motives, yet with a tendency to be blinded by their own prejudices, and wedded to the traditions of a quickly receding past. As such they must inevitably have become a reactionary force, a deadly drag upon all progress ; and Israel, if it had relied upon them alone, would have joined the concourse of nations whose religion, long outgrown, forms an insuperable barrier to further advance. Fortunately Yahweh possessed other and more potent representatives than the priests,

or even than His own anointed king ; these were His prophets. Other nations also possessed prophets, in the shape of enthusiastic devotees, such as those of Baal, who slashed themselves with knives when calling upon their God. Fanatics of this nature were not lacking amongst the Israelites, as may be learnt for instance from Saul's extraordinary behaviour when amongst them. But those prophets of Yahweh, to whom the word may legitimately be applied, were of a very different cast. Men of the highest character, and of pronounced individuality, they owed allegiance to none save Yahweh Himself. They were bound by no rules of the past, or conventions of the present. Possessed of the deepest insight into human nature, in every emergency relying solely upon their noblest instincts, they attained a position, the vast influence exerted by which was due entirely to the force of the personality of its holder, a position which needed for its support no stately robes or high-sounding titles. Beside them the priest shrank into insignificance, and kings cowered abashed before their rebuke.

Of these prophets Moses was again the first, although from the nature of his circumstances he was unable to hold any position similar to that above described. Not until the kingdom had been formed and settled could the rôle of prophet be separated from that of leader and organiser, and the former fell into his natural place within the body politic. Nathan and Gad are the first examples of Hebrew prophecy in its pure, completed form. It is to the lasting credit of the Israelites that they took the prophets implicitly at their own word, that they instinctively recognised the qualities of sincerity and intrepidity which went to the making of a prophet, and enthroned their owner high in their regard

above kings and princes. This was in the early days of the kingdom. In later ages, when men had become more sophisticated and conventions had hardened, the prophet was no longer sure of a welcome. Against opposition and prejudice he was compelled, as in every nation he has been compelled since, to fight his way upwards, and when at length by simple force of character he had attained to a commanding position, his advice was nullified by the ingrained stupidity and self-complacency of the mass of men to whom he addressed his words. But the days of David were those of the childhood of the race, when instincts ran strong and goodness could be recognised at sight. The character of David himself is that of a noble-hearted schoolboy. In the devotion with which he inspired his followers, in his ready answer to every generous impulse, in the noble ideals which inspired his life, but which were yet unable to provide him with strength of character or any measure of self-control, when assailed by sudden passion, may be discerned the traits still characteristic of fiery youth. Human nature could not have been expected to let the genuine prophets remain alone in their well-deserved position. Imitation was bound to follow acceptance. So we read of societies of "sons of the prophets," institutions no doubt intended for the turning out of prophets by the dozen. But these could not be manufactured; they, like all really great things that have ever been produced, were the product of the unconscious working of the vital force of mankind. There is no evidence whatever to show that one even of the great prophets was produced by these schools. We also come across large numbers of inferior men, the so-called false prophets, who thronged the courts of the

kings. They formed a parasitic crowd of second or third-rate persons no doubt well-meaning enough, but hopelessly subservient, and utterly unable to pierce beneath the surface of things. Whilst the false prophets followed one another like sheep asserting only what was reasonable and to be expected, a true prophet of Yahweh, like Micaiah, the son of Imlah, could always be discerned in that his statements ran contrary to accepted opinions and were usually of an unpleasant nature. Thus it was through His servants, the prophets, that the thought of Yahweh was kept alive and vigorous, and that every Israelite was made to realise that He had not deserted His chosen people, but was working with them and inspiring them still as in the days of yore. Through the prophets Israel retained consciousness of its unique national destiny ; for to them, though they allowed no outward semblances to blind their judgment, patriotism and religion were synonymous. The thought of the uniqueness of her destiny flows indeed naturally and of necessity from Israel's relations to Yahweh, which have been above considered. If she was God's chosen people, the choice must have been made for some ultimate purpose, the realisation of some aim which lay in the distant future and could be now but imperfectly grasped. It was this feeling, vague but potent, of being used for a purpose not their own which had sent the earliest Hebrews off on their wanderings. "Now Yahweh said unto Abram," such is the beginning of Hebrew history, "get thee out of thy country, and from thy kindred, and from thy father's house, unto the land that I will show thee ; and I will make of thee a great nation, and I will bless thee and make thy name great ; and in thee shall all the nations of the earth be blest."



In David's age the promise seemed to have been fulfilled in national expansion and military conquest. Subsequent reverses, however, soon clouded over these years of buoyant optimism, and the national anticipations were compelled to take on ever-varying forms; but through all changes of fortunes the patriotic hope remained, God's purpose was yet to be consummated. Not until after the beginning of our own era did this hope finally die out, and Judaism take its place amongst the religions of the past. It is not to be wondered at that the Christian Church looked upon the appearance of Jesus as the final event for which the whole course of its history had been preparing the Jewish people.

The ardent Israelite had thus no distracting cares to delay his advance, no hampering doubts, which a divided allegiance might cause. In obeying Yahweh's precepts he was doing his best to make his nation a more perfect instrument than before in Yahweh's hand; in following his patriotic impulses he was helping Yahweh towards the completion of His purpose.

Such was the set of ideas which every Israelite held more or less firmly with regard to His deity: in such a manner were pictured His power, His character, His dealings with His people. It remains for us to consider shortly what the Israelite thought of the nature of man, as well as what he thought of the nature of God. The Hebrew theories as to the nature of man, which were held just as the average man holds the theory of evolution to-day, were simple, "And God formed man of the dust of the ground, and breathed into his nostrils the breath of life, and man became a living soul."\* This

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\* The Hebrew word translated "soul" means, of course, as elsewhere in the Old Testament, simply "individual."

description is part of those old stories contained in the first eleven chapters of the book of Genesis, which were themselves based upon older ones which had circulated amongst the Semitic nations, ages, perhaps millennia, before Israel was parted from the nations, and which form the background of thought, out of which the religion of Yahweh grew. They represent the earliest stage of human thought, the time when man first realised himself, and became conscious of his own elevation above the brute creation.

In these stories every possible question is boldly confronted ; the nature of the universe and of man, the problems of life and death, of good and evil, marriage and child-bearing, the necessity of toil and the wearing of clothes, all these are disposed of in a manner at once concise and masterful. In Babylonia, the cradle of civilisation, many such narratives had been current for great ages. It was told how the earth had been evolved from a condition of chaos into one of order chiefly through the work of the God Merodach in conquering Tiamat the monster of darkness. There were also stories of a flood which had overwhelmed the whole earth and from which one man only had been saved by the favour of the gods. Hebrew writers of a later time, imbued with the Israelitish outlook, seized upon these stories and shaped them anew. The chief agents are no longer the multifarious gods of Babylonia ; but Yahweh, the one ruler of the universe. In the plural form, " Elohim," which is always used in the title, " Yahweh God," there seems to be left a relic of the times when the gods were thought of as many and not as one. To these writers the life of man and beasts, which distinguishes them from the lower creation, is resident in the breath, a natural thought enough, if not

absolutely the only one, which was possible to primitive man. This breath is the gift of Yahweh ; when He takes it away man becomes again a part of inorganic matter. "Dust thou art, and to dust shalt thou return" ; or, as the Psalmist sings, "When Thou takest away their breath they die, and return to their dust. When Thou lettest Thy breath go forth they shall be made, and Thou shalt renew the face of the earth." This conception, if logically adhered to, obviously left no room for a future life ; but there is no evidence to show that the Israelite did follow out the logic of such an idea. To him death was not a total end of existence. Engulfed in the bowels of the earth was the shadowy ghost world of Sheol or the pit, whither all men were to depart when this life was over, a place to which the oft-quoted description from the Babylonian story would apply,

"The house in which those who enter are deprived of light,  
Where dust is their nourishment, clay their food.  
They do not see light, they dwell in darkness,  
Clothed like a bird with wings as a covering :  
On door and lock dust has settled."

Here men walked in a life which is no life, removed from Yahweh's presence, bereft alike of despair or hope, of joy or sorrow. "The dead praise not Thee, O Yahweh ; neither all they that go down into silence. For in death no man remembereth Thee : and who will give Thee thanks in the pit ?"

But beyond man's actual existence upon this planet there were to be explained the circumstances of his life, his hopes and fears, his toils and troubles.

This need was satisfied by the story of the Fall. The first man is represented as living an innocent and a happy life, in communion with God, protected from all

cares and troubles. Yet his existence is not to continue unruffled. He feels a desire to become like the gods, knowing good and evil. In spite of God's prohibition he yields to this longing and plucks the fruit through which this desire may be gratified. Immediately his happiness is brought to a rude end. He is thrust out of the garden where his days had been spent serenely. To the man is given the task of labouring for his daily bread against perpetual difficulties, to the woman the bearing of children and the position of subjection. "Thy desire shalt be unto thy husband, and thou shalt serve him." Such is the story which for about 3,000 years has provided human beings with an explanation of their position and duties on this earth. And, although the details need not be taken literally, we may truly say that no better explanation has been or perhaps ever can be given. Certainly modern science, with its evolution theory, is unable to supply the place. Not, indeed, that there is any contradiction between the two explanations. The men of science assert that man, as we know him, was the final product of a long, upward process of evolution, extending through unknown ages. The writer in Genesis does not contradict this. Indeed, his story might be called the story of the Rise as well as of the Fall ; for it treats of both. He regards man as separated from the rest of God's creation, from the plants and the animals, by the possession of a moral sense, the knowledge of good and evil. There must have been a moment when man entered upon this possession, and established his identity as a free self-acting agent, unlike the animals who live by natural instinct. But this upward step was attended with evil consequences. With the knowledge of the moral law came weakness and the inability to keep

it ; hence sin and its attendant train of sufferings. The experience of Adam is reproduced in St. Paul, and probably in a greater or less degree in all human beings, " I had not known sin, but by the law." " I was alive without the law once : but when the commandment came, sin revived, and I died."

Such is the Biblical story which attempts to explain the weakness of human nature, and the contradictions and lack of harmony with which human life finds itself confronted. Such lack of harmony was due in the first place to a weak and a wrongful use of great privileges, the gratification of a momentary curiosity being preferred to a patient obedience and submission to the will of the Almighty. The Jewish and Christian churches have taught that, owing to the sin of the first man human nature has ever since been afflicted by weakness, the tendency, that is, to put momentary gratification first and loyal service second, a condition from which we may only be freed after bitter struggles and hard experience. Nor is this doctrine as yet superseded.

## CHAPTER II.

### ORIENTAL RELIGIONS

WE have seen that Israel had inherited from the background of common Semitic thought a philosophy of life, out of which was developed, in the course of her career, the religion of Yahweh, He in the mind of the Israelite occupying the place and performing the functions which had been attributed by His primitive ancestor to many various agencies. In order the more thoroughly to appreciate the unique character of Israel's faith it is necessary to contrast it with the forms of religion developed by most other Eastern races, in particular with those into contact with which Israel was brought after the period of her schooling was over. These nations' outlook upon the world was, of course, to a large extent determined by the nature of their growth and development, and the character of the lands they inhabited. Whilst Israel's was fundamentally a God of wandering shepherds and daring warriors, the deities of the peoples around were those suited to a state of agriculture and fairly settled prosperity. In Babylonia this had been the condition for untold ages before the departure of Abraham, a fact of which the evidence remains in the book of Genesis. To the historian of the " Fall " the pursuit of husbandry is man's obvious and natural mode of existence ; why this was so he made it his object to explain. " Cursed is the ground for thy sake ; in sorrow shalt thou eat of it all the days of thy



life ; thorns also and thistles shall it bring forth to thee ; and thou shalt eat the herb of the field ; in the sweat of thy brow shalt thou eat bread, till thou return unto the ground ; for out of it wast thou taken : for dust thou art, and unto dust shalt thou return.” If the Hebrews had invented for themselves an ancestor from whom all men were sprung, he would have been a shepherd like Abraham ; not a farmer, as was Adam. The latter is obviously a borrowed figure ; he was appropriated by, but is no native of, the Hebrew race. If, then, this narrative was singled out by the Hebrew genius as that which would form the most suitable foundation for its whole philosophy of life, other Oriental religions developing upon different lines took to themselves two elements, both of which are lacking to the story of Adam, the elements, that is, of mysticism and of lightheartedness.

Of these the first is that which most absolutely and decidedly differentiates them from the Hebrew views of life. For the Hebrew race, like the English, is essentially prosaic and matter of fact. Both nations, it is true, have produced great poets and much noble soul-inspiring poetry ; yet both remain at heart ineradicably prosaic. The inspiring force of their poetry has been due to a peculiar earnestness and sincerity in their outlook upon life, a sincerity which has marked the leading men of both nations, but in which the imaginative faculty has been allowed to play only a subordinate part. To the Jew, taking but one example, the moon was a luminary, useful and beneficent, placed in the sky by Yahweh, who took a kindly interest in seeing that men did not lose their path in the dark. The average Englishman, if he is religiously inclined, experiences the same feeling of grateful emotion ; whilst if his bent is scientific, the

moon becomes a globe of dead matter receiving a second-hand illumination from the rays of the sun. Compare with these the spontaneous rush of feeling, the indefinable rapture to which ancient peoples of the East were moved at the same sight, a sensation which could not be better expressed than by Mr. F. W. Bain, who himself, by residence in Eastern countries and sympathetic appreciation of the Hindu mythology, has caught, in spite of the disadvantages of race, something of its marvellous spirit. "Our author," he writes, in his preface to the story from the old Sanscrit entitled, "In the Great God's Hair," "has instinctively seized a subtle analogy, difficult to analyse, and more obvious perhaps in the clear and silent Indian atmosphere than in our own thick and foggy clime: one, however, to which all ancient mythologies bear witness, by invariably associating their Great Goddesses with the moon. Night after night, when the fierce fury of the merciless, intolerable Indian sun has spent its energy, when at last the enemy has gone, and the blue, mild, lustrous dark with its healing, soothing, balmy peace has fallen over the fainting world, I have watched the inexhaustible Beauty of the Moon: and then it is, that there seems as it were to glide into the soul, like a nurse into a sick-room, something, some presence, vast, infinite, and feminine. Something there seems to be in common, something that all the ancient nations felt, between the beauty of an Eastern night with the moon in its forehead, and the strange, consolatory cosmic magnetism that woman and her mystic beauty exert over her everlasting patient, Man." It is this feeling, this instinctive recognition of a connection, of a subtle indefinable interaction between man and the universe around, of which he forms a part,

which our English nature-poets lack. There is this something, this penetration into the secret of nature, for which they are ever groping, and to which they never attain. With the outside appearance of things, the glorious tints of nature, the marvellous complexity and beauty of her structures they cannot rest content. These do not give them the satisfaction they seek. Yet they hope that by immersing themselves in these, by training the eye to appreciate every gradation of tint, the ear to analyse every forest sound, they will one day compel Nature to yield up her secret. Alas, it can never be. Byron, it is, of all our poets who attains most nearly to this hope.

“Are not the mountains, waves, and skies, a part  
Of me and of my soul, as I of them?”

Yet even here the feeling is but transitory after all ; there is a note of effort about it, an uncertainty whether the imagination can be for long sustained upon this high level. The mere fact that Byron is compelled to put to himself this question shows that he feels the separation between his own nature and that of the universe ; the elements are different, and to make them coalesce completely is impossible.

We have given the case of the moon, as one particular instance of this seemingly ingrained difference of constitution. The globe, which men inhabit, with its teeming life, both animal and vegetable, will afford a still deeper illustration. To the Englishman the piece of earth upon which he dwells is regarded as so much potential wealth ; it is his business to extract from it as much value as possible. Even if he is an artist this idea changes but its direction ; the earth now becomes

a storehouse of beautiful suggestions and inspiring thoughts, a treasury from which he may draw spiritual, as the farmer draws bodily, sustenance. The Jewish notion was precisely the same, although tinged with a note of fervent gratitude, which the Englishman in these scientific days is rapidly losing. "He bringeth forth grass for the cattle; and green herb for the service of men; that He may bring food out of the earth, and wine that maketh glad the heart of man; and oil to make him a cheerful countenance, and bread to strengthen man's heart." The typical Oriental could never have expressed his thoughts in this way. To him his own individual life was but a portion of that greater life, which issued from the heart of the universe, a life which manifested itself in plants and animals, in man and in the great Gods above. The connection between him and the earth, as between him and the Gods, was natural and intimate. This globe was the great Mother Earth from whose womb man had come forth, upon whose bosom he lay, the source of all life and being, the fount of all productive energy. All the great Goddesses of antiquity, Ishtar of the Babylonians, Isis of the Egyptians, Atargatis, Cybele, Demeter, Aphrodite, were but slightly varying personifications of the great primal female energy. The very word personification carries with it a misconception to English ears; for it necessarily implies the existence of something to be personified, which for that reason cannot by any chance really be a person. The Oriental drew no such hard and fast line as we have invented; to him life in all its aspects was one and indivisible, all personal or all impersonal, whichever term may be held more aptly to describe the thought. But this Life was not mani-

fested steadily or without intermission. Like all things upon this earth it was subject to the periodic law, its energy ebbed and flowed with the waxing and waning of the seasons, at one time throbbing in fullest vigour, at another seeming almost to die completely away. To be sure, the great Mother herself never died; it was her offspring, the youthful Tammuz, or Adonis, who, on the decay of vegetation and the apparent cessation of life, was forced to depart to the gloomy realms beneath. But here his mother, who at the same time, by one of these kaleidoscopic changes natural to the Eastern mind, was his lover, also was unable to leave him. She too descended to the realms of darkness in order to restore her consort to the life above, that by their union new life in ever fresh abundance might be brought forth. Then, when this new life too began to wane, the drama would once more be repeated, and the great Mother would once more enter upon her arduous task. This was the period, whilst the Goddess was groping in the nether regions, when life was at its lowest ebb, and the energising forces of the universe were all alike at rest.

“When the lady Ishtar had descended to the land  
without return,

The bull no longer mounted the cow, the ass did not  
mount the she-ass,

The man did not go to the maid.”

More especially did such thoughts as these cling around the fruits of the earth, which were produced directly to minister to man's needs, that is to say, in agricultural countries, like Egypt or Babylon, the wheat, the barley, and other field-produce. These fruits were enriched in the imagination above other plants in that they both possessed life in themselves and also sustained and vivi-

fied the life of men. The fertile grain was at once an integral portion of the all-pervading life, and at the same time a gift of that spirit; nor did the Earth Mother recklessly bestow her boons upon mankind; they were given only as a reward to his toil and arduous labour. One shape into which this thought was cast must be familiar to readers of "Hiawatha." There are to be found in one small compass all the three ideas mentioned above, that of the Great Spirit's gift, that of the spirit life contained within the corn itself, and that of man's toil and ingenuity, which are essential for the obtaining of this gift, and taming of the corn.

"You shall hear how Hiawatha  
Prayed and fasted in the forest,  
Not for greater skill in hunting,  
Not for greater craft in fishing,  
But for profit of the people,  
For advantage of the nations."

His fast was rewarded by the appearance before the door of his wigwam of a youth dressed in green and yellow garments.

"Plumes of green bent o'er his forehead,  
And his hair was soft and golden."

He comes to Hiawatha with a promise and a challenge.

"From the Master of Life descending  
I, the friend of man, Mondamin,  
Come to warn you and instruct you,  
How by struggle and by labour  
You shall gain what you have prayed for.  
Rise up from your bed of branches,  
Rise, O youth, and wrestle with me."

Hiawatha obeys the challenge, and by dint of the greatest exertion comes off victorious in the contest.



“Suddenly upon the greensward  
All alone stood Hiawatha ;  
And before him breathless, lifeless,  
Lay the youth with hair dishevelled,  
Plumage torn and garments tattered,  
Dead he lay there in the sunset.  
And victorious Hiawatha  
Made the grave as he commanded,  
Stripped the garments from Mondamin,  
Stripped his tattered plumage from him,  
Laid him in the earth, and made it  
Soft and loose and light above him ;  
And still later, when the autumn  
Changed the long green leaves to yellow,  
Then the ripened ears he gathered,  
As he once had stripped the wrestler,  
Gave the first feast of Mondamin,  
And made known unto the people  
This new gift of the great spirit.”

As it is around the feast of Mondamin, the harvest festival, when the ripe ears of the maize were gathered in, that this story of Hiawatha is centred, so the Babylonian stories clung to the festival of Tammuz. This took place in the month of June, at the time of the harvest, before the scorching winds of midsummer swept over the Mesopotamian plain, and left the country dried and withered behind them, totally deprived of the fresh green luxuriance of spring. As the ears of corn were picked and the grains of corn crushed in the mills, so Tammuz annually died, and his death was heralded by wails of lamentation from the assembled women. The evidence before us is not sufficient to say for certain ; but it is extremely probable that within a few days the mourning was changed into scenes of joy, a happy anticipation of the young God's return to life and activity, both in next year's ensuing harvest, and in the vigorous

life with which he by his death was about to endow mankind. Many students of religion show a tendency to assume that the origin of these ancient festivals is to be found only in the motive of fear, and the hope of propitiation. Thus the weeping women wept only crocodiles' tears, for fear that the corn-spirit might be offended at the treatment he was receiving, and refuse to grow next year. These strains of fear and dismay did no doubt enter into his composition ; as they do into the character of every human being that has ever been born ; but to assume that early man was actuated solely by the motives of fear, that to him the world was simply a place full of unknown enemies, and that his religion and ceremonies were merely devices for diverting from himself the attacks of these enemies, is as unwarrantable as it is unreasonable. If primitive man went about in a constant shivering fear of traps and pitfalls, how comes it that his descendants have so greatly altered ? Life has become not less, but more dangerous in modern times. As society becomes additionally complex, so does the instability of the basis upon which every individual stands become ever more apparent. With the development of machinery the chances of accident are in every department of life enormously increased, and with the manifold complications of modern finance, ruin, brought about by causes totally beyond his own control, may any day confront the most successful man. Yet, such is the buoyancy of human nature, that no one ever thinks of an accident until he is actually confronted by it, and the man situated on the very brink of a dread abyss, will often walk with a light heart and a comfortable assurance that things will come right yet. It is true that this

attitude is largely due to the development of self-control, which modern civilisation fosters. But this same development tends to the crushing of all natural emotions, of those of love and gratitude as well as of those of fear. In the unlettered masses of every country human nature retains a character which it has held unchanged for vast ages, if not almost from the time when man first became differentiated from his ancestor the ape. These are the people swayed by emotion, whose instincts good and bad alike run clear and strong like mountain streams, but none of which are ever long-lasting. Fear, hatred, gratitude in turn engulf one another as they sweep in succession over the mind ; quick revulsions of feeling are natural to the constitution of man in his childish state. Threats of revenge are never carried out ; promises of ardent and lasting affection soon wither beneath the passage of time. At the same time ills possess a bitterness and pleasures an abounding joy, to which more sophisticated man is quite a stranger. Indeed the two emotions of pleasure and sadness are never really apart ; as in our own childhood the happiest moments are likewise those of a most wistful longing, and the transitoriness of the present ever clouds and yet intensifies its joy. Perhaps the surest key which a modern scholar could possess to unlock the real feelings of primitive people would be the recollections of his own childhood. Looking at the matter from this point of view, it is easy to see that the tears of the women weeping for Tammuz may have been very real tears, tears of a sorrow indefinable, yet very real for a something which had passed and could never return, whilst in the subsequent festival full reins were given to that impulse to thank somebody or some-

thing, which still draws our village swains to church to sing the hymns of harvest thanksgiving.

St. Paul, who seems to have felt by a marvellous instinct the exact nature and outlook upon life of all men with whom he came into contact, recognised this fundamental emotion to be at the bottom of the religion of the rude populace of Lystra. "And yet He left not Himself without witness, in that He did good, and gave you from heaven rains and fruitful seasons, filling your hearts with food and gladness."

The festival of Adonis was widely celebrated throughout Mesopotamia, and the whole of Syria; Egypt in her feasts of Osiris gave her own characteristic form to the same fundamental ideas; and the wilder populace of Asia Minor celebrated the rites of the kindred God, Attis. From Theocritus' poem, translated by Matthew Arnold, we see how in the time of the Ptolemies the feast of Adonis had degenerated, within the cities at any rate, into a mere society function. In later ages still, when under the Roman Imperial sway, the old habits of life were everywhere breaking up, around these primitive festivals new ideas began to cluster. With the growth of civilisation and self-consciousness, the old, happy natural life began to disappear; men became conscious of an unsatisfied want, of a dim desire for something which eluded their search, of a disharmony in life which ordinary interests or occupations failed to remove. So in their search their notice became attracted towards these old customs; in the unusual and the ancient they thought they might find solace. So the festivals became mysteries, in which the old thoughts of the life and death of the corn-spirit became analogous representations of the process within the

devotee's soul ; a process in which his " Old Man " was put away, and he was renewed to regeneration of life.

But there is another aspect of these ancient festival which has yet to be mentioned, and which dates back to their very earliest commencement. Eastern peoples, with their conception of the oneness of Nature and of Life, imagined that they could help on the growth of the corn for their own benefit, by actual representations of the drama, which was enacted by the great Gods. When we remember that in the stories the son was likewise the lover of the Mother Goddess, and that the whole legend was a realistic presentation of the productive energy of the universe, it is easy to see that this thought must have tended to lend itself to many licentious rites. The emotions of the populace would often lead to orgies of dissipation and excess, in which all would be striving to follow the example of the fertile mother, and by the creation of fresh life and energy to help on the purpose of the universe. Further than this, in many of the central sanctuaries of Adonis, were to be found women who had devoted their lives in this way to the service of the God ; and in some countries it was the rule for every woman before she could get married to give herself during a short period of time to the same purpose. These practices in all probability dated from a far distant time, before marriage had been instituted at all ; a time when the mother was all-important, and matriarchal succession was the rule, for the reason that no father would be as such specifically known. In this way by reviving and crystallising a relic of a communistic past, Oriental religions became a drag upon progress, and a menace to society.

Egypt, Mesopotamia, and Asia Minor, the lands where such feasts as have been briefly described, the harvest festivals of Tammuz or of Attis or Osiris, were indigenous, were lands of great regularity of physical feature and climatic conditions. Year after year with the succession of the seasons the earth in due course brought forth her fruits, and the aspects of the wide and fertile plains of Mesopotamia or the Nile valley with the utmost regularity passed through the same changes, the green fields covered with the freshly sprouting corn being mellowed into the yellowness of harvest, and that in turn giving place to the bare outlook of the hot summer and the cool winter months. In the land of Syria, of which Palestine formed a part, a very different condition of things was to be found. Here are the most varying conditions of climate to be found within a similarly small compass in any quarter of the globe. Almost every gradation of natural scenery is represented, embracing fertile plains, desert steppes, snow-clad mountain peaks, and deep gorges like that through which the Jordan flows, boasting a vegetation of tropical luxuriance. While again in Egypt and Mesopotamia the fertility of the country was almost entirely due to the great rivers, which flowed through them, rivers whose life-giving power was harnessed and regulated by the elaborate network of great canals ; in Syria man was almost entirely dependent for his sustenance upon the kindness of Nature. Under these conditions the forms of worship characteristic of the preceding countries appear in a localised and specialised character, that known as Baal worship. In ancient times, before Palestine and the neighbouring countries had come at all under cultivation, it is probable that



man found his imagination attracted and his curiosity arrested by the spots upon the mountain sides or in the dreary deserts, where a spring of water bubbling forth produced around it a luxuriant verdure. Here, if anywhere, seemed to be manifested the creative energy of Nature, and life of a kind similar to man's own seemed to be exerting its powers. The contrast between such spots and the great deserts was enormous ; but scarcely less wonderful could they have appeared in Palestine itself. For that land was, as it has always remained, essentially a rocky and barren country, although to the Israelite, weary of his wanderings, it might veritably seem a "land flowing with milk and honey." The southern portion of the Judean wilderness and the long desolate slopes down to the Dead Sea are said by travellers to afford the dreariest prospect which could possibly be conceived, whilst even in the more northern portions upon the rounded hills, where by dint of severe exertion terraces could be carved out, upon which the vine and olive could be profitably reared, the tendency following upon any diminution of men's efforts is to revert to the primitive stony barrenness. In a country then, where the rains were intermittent and not thoroughly to be depended upon at that, where there are no perennial streams, such as exist being dry beds in summer, roaring mountain torrents in winter, the God of the broad waving cornfields of Mesopotamia became converted into the God of the desert oasis or the mountain grotto, the spots where He seemed to reside permanently, and put forth His power to replenish the earth. Here were established ancient sanctuaries, which, like those of Hebron, Jerusalem, Bethel or Dan, survived great vicissitudes of fortune, whither repaired the humble votary to fulfil

his vow and gratify his reverential awe. Ages before the country was at all cultivated the simple Bedouin, were doubtless in the habit of repairing to these spots, and around them the first efforts at cultivation of the ground were doubtless centred. So the Baal or lord of the spring became the lord and life-giver of the district round, and the special protector of its inhabitants. His central sanctuary and special place of abode was at the spring where his waters gushed forth, and here was his worship established, under every green tree, as the Old Testament narrator describes it. In later days, when the rest of the country was brought under cultivation, and the farmers were dependent upon the rains of heaven for their wine and their yields of corn, the thought of the Baal seems to have been extended, and a Baal of the heavens to have been established alongside of his older compatriots. To this later idea is to be attributed the establishment of sanctuaries upon the hill tops, naturally conceived as the most fitting places for the worship of a divinity who manifested his power from the skies. This Baal worship suffered from all the drawbacks which characterised the kindred devotions to Tammuz and Ishtar. Like them, it was in the first instance an outlet for enthusiasm ; and, like them, its energising force sprang from the essential feeling of the oneness of life and being, and of joy in the reproductive powers of the universe. Hence there became inseparable from it those " abominations " of which the Old Testament writers so often and bitterly complain, and " sodomites " became regularly attached to many sanctuaries in the due service of the Baal.

But let us at this point pause a moment in order to take breath and look around us. We have hitherto

been talking somewhat glibly of the religions of nations and of peoples ; but are we sure that we know what we mean by those expressions ? As a matter of fact, the greatest uncertainty exists, even amongst its official exponents, as to what constitutes religion and what does not, and the broader becomes our basis as we proceed from the consideration of individuals to that of nations, the more is this uncertainty increased. A good definition which might be employed for a national religion, seems to be that in that religion a nation's " outlook upon life " is expressed. But what then is any particular nation's " outlook upon life " ; and how much or how little of it is embraced within the national religion ? The confusion over this point arises from the fact that, whilst in early nations religion did embrace the whole of life, almost every detail of which was referred in some way to a divine ordinance, in modern society, on the other hand, the term has become restricted to a small portion of life, and that one whose limits are of the vaguest. If the religion of the English race is to be synonymous with its whole " outlook upon life " to-day, it would have to include the worship of science and the belief in patent medicines as surely as the Hebrew religion included the system of sacrifice and the employment of Urim and Thummim, ceremonial uncleanness would be on all fours with such institutions as vaccination or compulsory fumigation after illness, and the avoidance of pigs' flesh by the Jews would be parallel to our own social convention which bans the cat as an article of domestic diet. In order to avoid this difficulty it will be best to limit our definition, and to explain religion, whether of individuals or of nations, as " the outlook upon life, so far as it is conceived to be dependent

upon higher powers," or put more shortly, religion is the recognition by men of their dependence upon higher powers. In ancient nations as we have seen, such outlook or such recognition involved almost every department of life.

If it then be accepted that the religion of an ancient nation embraced its whole outlook upon life, the further question arises, "How is this outlook determined? Is it the outlook of the average individual of which that nation is composed, the somewhat ambiguous 'man in the street,' or is it that of the great leaders and thinkers, an outlook to which the ordinary individual can but do his little best to approximate?" The second of these alternatives must obviously be the correct one. In the case of Israel the thought of Yahweh's leadership and of Israel's unique destiny according to His purposes were ideas which the average individual, even in times of the greatest national exaltation and expansion, could but imperfectly grasp; only in the men of loftiest ideals, and transcendent ability, that is, the prophets, could these thoughts be realised in anything like their impressive grandeur. It might indeed be supposed *a priori* that the nation which of all Oriental peoples could produce so marvellous a series of great personalities, of supermen, as Mr. Bernard Shaw styles them, must have contained in the composition of its humblest member a fibre, which would raise him above the ordinary material of other nations. On inspection this is seen not to be the case. The average Israelite was a being of human nature, almost exactly similar, as far as can be judged, to other human nature as it existed in his day, and has continued ever since. The statement then made in the preceding chapter that Israel's claim to pre-eminence

in the religious sphere lay in the fact that Yahweh occupied all the thoughts and aspirations of the Israelite must be qualified to apply to Israel's greatest men alone. To them the thought of Yahweh was the one ruling motive of life, a thought which they endeavoured, with varying success, to communicate to the rank and file of the nation. Sometimes this thought was ardently seized upon, at other times totally neglected by the pious Israelites. For the Israelites in all their doings, like most men of all ages, were always pious. This is not the same thing as saying that most men have been religious ; for it is necessary in discussing questions of this kind to draw, for convenience sake, a sharp distinction between religion and piety, the one being thought of as the force which rules a man's heart and motives, the other as the outward expression which is given to these inner feelings. Religion deals with the force which some men, and those the greatest, feel impelling them through life ; a force, without which they would wither as an oak leaf withers when deprived of its sap ; piety is the force which causes most men to attach themselves to certain institutions or to swear allegiance to certain phrases which as a rule they consider the only divine institutions and the absolutely true phrases, and in defence of which, if they are pious enough, they are ready to yield up even life itself. The religious man knows himself to be no free agent, he is a tool in the hands of a greater force, the force which energises the universe, he is being employed for a purpose, which in part he knows and in part he cannot grasp. To this force, which controls him, he usually, not always, has given the name of God, and conceived of it as a person like himself. To God he can perfectly trust ; in His



arms he is safe. Like machinery of the very finest workmanship he answers to the slightest impulse of this outside power, which yet seems to reside within his being. His impulses may lead him into paths which seem extraordinary and eccentric, but follow unfalteringly he must. He is perfectly self-reliant, because in nothing does he rely upon himself. Yet he knows that if he but hesitate, if he let outside considerations, affection, propriety, convenience, warp his purpose and divert his energies, at that moment he is lost ; the power, which has hitherto carried him on, will cast him remorselessly upon the scrap-heap, a worn-out engine, which in the moment of trial has been unable to stand the necessary pressure. " I subdue my body and keep it under subjection, lest having preached to others I myself should be a castaway." The pious man is he who accepts without questioning the circumstances under which he finds himself, and the profession which seems best suited to his powers or into which fortune draws him. He is not thereby rendered totally blind to the problems of existence, which as a rule he deems to have been solved by people wiser and greater than himself. The nature of this solution, which he accepts, depends largely upon his temperament and the circumstances under which he has been brought up. At the present moment it may be said that a pious man belonging to the upper classes of society, and possessed of an imaginative, musical, or æsthetic type of mind, is extremely likely to attach himself to an ancient institution such as the Church, whose impressive ceremonial or beautifully chanted psalms appeal to his temperament ; if again, he belongs to the lower classes and is fired with indignation at the unfair-



ness of his position, he may become a Socialist, and with all his heart and mind subscribe to a creed whose first article is, "I believe in the collective ownership of the means of production"; or, again, if besides being unimaginative he is in fairly comfortable circumstances, he may accept science as his master and consider the whole enigma solved by the "survival of the fittest" or "adaptation to environment." These last are they of whom it has been written, "The fool has said in his heart, 'There is no God.'" The Psalmist may seem here to be guilty of the use of unguarded or exaggerated language. In reality he is not so; for to the religious man there can be nothing so incredible or unnatural as a negative creed. To him it is as if a man were to live without air. To him, if the power which impels him be but withdrawn, if his belief in God disappears, the world becomes a dreary desert, a "City of Dreadful Night," wherein men stalk like phantoms, heartless, hopeless, meaningless, where there is no profit for the dead or for the living, but all is vanity and a searching after wind. This is a morbid state of mind into which the ordinary pious individual, very fortunately for him, is in no danger of falling. He merely wants something to cling to, a formula which he may make his own, and for which he may be prepared to wage battle. So it comes about, for instance, that Professor Haeckel, whose philosophic system holds out no ray of hope or encouragement either to the individual or the human race as a whole, pledges his faith in the existence of ether with an enthusiasm worthy of a Spanish Inquisitor.

Mankind, then, as a whole, may be divided into these two classes. There may indeed exist individuals who are neither religious nor pious, persons too empty-

headed to attach themselves to any cause or to think in terms which do more than cover the needs of the moment ; but these, if such there be, are the wasters, of whom history need take no account. Of those remaining the vast majority belong to the ranks of the pious. These throng every station in life, from the illiterate workman, who is ready to wax enthusiastic over any cause whatever, if it be but presented to him in a sufficiently convincing fashion, and if it in any way appeal to his instincts, to the philosophic believer, who produces volumes of reasoning in support of a wholly unreasonable position, which he holds simply because it happens to appeal to him most. The religious men are likewise to be found in every class of society ; they embrace not only the many like Socrates or St. Paul, whose names have been established in the forefront of history, but numerous others in all ages, who have travelled their path, strong with the strength of God, and steadfastly believing that they are in all things the ministers of the power of the universe. They follow no hue and cry, but test everything by the touchstone of their own inner consciousness. They produce no philosophical tracts, for the force which inspires them needs no such support which these would be able to afford it.

If, however, a clear line of distinction be required to be drawn between the religious and the pious, the systematiser will find that in this as in other departments of knowledge he will be forced to endure disappointment. No hard and fast line can be drawn ; indeed, great numbers of men have been religious in one department of life, and pious in all others. Of this latter dictum no better illustration could perhaps be afforded than the

case of David. There is nothing in the historical narratives to lead us to believe that David was more than an ardently pious man, as was natural to one of his emotional temperament. In his subservience to priest and prophet, in his treatment of the ark and the tabernacle, in his punctilious observance of religious ceremonies, we find piety seeking its natural outlets. Yet David was much more than this. Turning to the eighteenth Psalm, given also in II. Sam. xxii., of the Davidic authorship of which there need be no doubt, we find there the truest and fullest outpouring of the genuine religious spirit.

“Thou art my lamp, O Yahweh :  
And Yahweh will lighten my darkness.  
For by thee I run through a troop ;  
By my God do I leap over a wall.  
For who is God, save Yahweh ?  
And who is a rock, save our God ?  
He maketh my feet like hind's feet ;  
And setteth me upon my high places.  
He teaches my hands to war ;  
So that mine arms do bend a bow of brass.”

David then attributed the qualities which gave him his position and enabled him to save his country to the power of Yahweh, impelling him on. Thus he has rightly been taken as a type of the religious hero, an ancient Knight of the Holy Grail, whose religion did not, however, so penetrate his whole life as to give him complete independence from the ruling powers and institutions. The prophets, greater men than David, were greater inasmuch as their religious force impelled them to take nothing whatever for granted, to strip the mask off all conventions and remorselessly to expose all shams.

## CHAPTER III.

### ISRAEL UNDER THE KINGS.

IN accordance with the foregoing discussion, although logically it is necessary to limit the use of the terms "religion" or "religious" so as to apply them only to exceptional individuals, yet it will be found more convenient to continue to employ them in the current accepted manner, that is to say, when speaking of a people's religion, we shall have in mind all those departments of life and thought which are in any way connected with or dependent upon powers higher than man, and which in ancient nations embraced practically the whole of life. In dealing with individuals we shall hope to keep rigidly to the distinction above defined between religion and piety. We have then confronting us two main types of religious thought. The first is that of Israel, the type more natural to a nomadic and predatory or warlike nation inured to vicissitudes of fortune, in which the God of the nation is conceived of essentially as a man possessed of vast powers, who governs the whole earth, whilst His purpose is always centred upon His chosen people, who gives good gifts, rain from heaven, fruits from the earth, sunshine, warmth and beauty, as a father gladly supports his family, and who is always ready in times of stress to inspire and lead on his people. The second is that of a fixed agricultural population, which has seen no change within the memory of man, and whose imagination is profoundly affected by the

spectacle of the ever-changing life of the earth. The good things of life are the gift of the great Mother Earth, upon whose bosom men rest, and who is at once the symbol and the efficient cause of all creative and re-productive energy. For want of better terms we may define these two outlooks as respectively the transcendent and the immanent ways of regarding life. Not that, as far as we can judge, there ever existed any nation whose outlook was solely of the latter class. In Mesopotamia, and in Egypt, as the big towns grew up with warlike proclivities, as great kings arose to subdue their neighbours and found empires, so each of these warlike states developed a tutelary deity, whose worship flourished alongside of the older earth-worship. Thus Merodach of Babylon, Nebo of Borsippa, Asshur of Assyria, or in Egypt Amon of Thebes, and Ptah of Memphis, were gods whose relation to their people did not differ in any fundamental particulars from that of Yahweh towards Israel. Their temples, each in the central city, with their priests, sacrifices and other appliances, were on exactly the same level as Solomon's temple at Jerusalem ; in Babylonia indeed many of these had been developed as national institutions to a degree which made them socially far more valuable than the temple of Yahweh ever became. The temple of Nebo, for instance, the god of letters, was doubtless a centre of learning and enlightenment for the whole community. Nor were Israel's beliefs fundamentally different from those of the kindred nations around. Mesha, king of Moab, who, like the subjects over whom he ruled, was a sheep-master, as we know from the Moabite stone, regarded his god Chemosh in much the same way as David or other kings of Israel regarded Yahweh. In

days of stress and adversity Chemosh is angry with his people, but when success returns his countenance has again been turned towards them. It is he who gives victory over enemies, and in whose strength the king rules. And so, although the loftiest souls Israel produced knew and felt that the God who inspired them and Israel was ruler of Heaven and earth, it was not unnatural for more commonplace Israelites to fail to rise to the full height of this conception, and for Jephthah to ask : " Wilt not thou possess that which Chemosh thy God giveth thee to possess ? " or that David, on being driven forth, should be tauntingly required to " Go, serve other gods." The average pious Israelite was then, as has been seen before, much the same as the ordinary individual of other races. He was ready to attach himself to the institutions and the ideas which were presented to him, and which best accorded with his own instincts. These instincts had been strongly developed by the vicissitudes of fortune to include belief in a God who demanded justice and mercy, and who abhorred the abominations which had come to be connected with the Baal worship. Yahweh remained, as He had always been, essentially a pastoral rather than an agricultural deity. But these instincts were not strong enough to resist the seductions offered by the native worship when the pastoral had been exchanged for the agricultural mode of life, and when a united band of hardy Bedouin had been changed into a population of peaceful farmers. It was upon these inherited instincts, and upon these alone, that the prophets attempted to found their work. In the prophets Israel possessed an unbroken chain of great religious men, and her history up to the time of the exile is a history of their continuous



effort to inspire the ordinary Israelite with the strong emotion which controlled themselves, and to raise a pious into a religious nation.

But before proceeding with the history of the religion, or rather, of the piety, of Israel, there is another point of view from which the work of the prophets from Moses onwards must be regarded. The keynote to all their teaching is to be found in the fact, a fact the truth of which is evidenced by the whole history of mankind up to the present, that a nation in order to survive and flourish must preserve intact its own individuality. This was a truth at which the prophets did not arrive by scientific deduction, but which they instinctively felt. Israel, from her earliest beginnings under Abraham had been developing a distinct individuality and a definite national self-consciousness. Whilst the other nations around were all more or less on a level, one at one time excelling in military strength, or another in the degree of civilisation at which she had arrived, Israel felt herself apart and in some peculiar manner superior to them all. It was imperative for the national existence that this feeling should be fostered ; and so we may say that the prophets' energy was spent in the endeavour to elevate the piety of the average Israelite, to prevent him from sinking to the ordinary level of the nations around, but to foster within him confidence in the unique position he and his country occupied. In this attempt the prophets were successful. Although from the constitution of human nature they were unable to turn piety into real religion, yet by the very force of their energy they were able to impress upon that piety the stamp of their own intuitions, and thus to preserve Israel from being submerged in the tossing sea of the nations.

Israel's individuality was threatened by two hostile influences, the one consisting of the clinging beliefs which Abraham's followers had doubtless brought with them out of the land whence they originated, the other that of the influence of the native population of Palestine, into which land they came. The first of these dangers, though quickly obliterated by its more formidable rival, was doubtless very great in the period preceding the invasion of Palestine. The Nomadic Hebrew tribes, which migrated from Ur and Haran, must have embraced a great number of the ideas common to all the Semitic nations. Amongst these has already been noticed that of sacrifice; another of importance was the dedication of the firstborn to Yahweh. In the oldest times probably the firstborn had been sacrificed, his death perhaps being a human enactment of the death of the corn-spirit. But it was more especially in the personal home-life of the Israelite that such ancient usages were apt to survive and flourish. They appear very typically in the shape of "teraphim," and of the anomalous creations known as "ephods." On the nature of the latter we are totally in the dark; but on the former it is safe to say that the teraphim were of the nature of "penates" or domestic gods of the hearth, like the numerous images which adorn Chinese homesteads of to-day. Around these homely deities the affection of the rude Israelites was sure to cling, although even in patriarchal times their worship was felt to be derogatory to the dignity of the true God. Rachel, we know, stole her father Laban's images; but as the result of the severe crisis when the Hebrews stood in danger of imminent destruction at the hands of their fellow Edomites, typified by Esau, under a natural out-

burst of feeling the strange gods were all collected and buried beneath the oak in Shechem. In this connection the twenty-fourth chapter of Joshua is most instructive, a chapter of which the antiquity is proved by the fact that the scene of action is placed in the ancient Canaanite sanctuary of Shechem. In it an accurate picture is to be found of the state of mind of the exulting Israelites after the first flush of a highly successful campaign, and at the same time a true prognostication of what the future will bring forth. The aged Joshua, as his leadership draws to its close, is addressing words of solemn warning to the excited people. The whole history of Israel is briefly reviewed, and then comes the appeal, which at this crisis of fortune must be decided once and for all. "Now therefore fear Yahweh and serve Him in sincerity and in truth; and put away the gods which your fathers served beyond the river and in Egypt; and serve ye Yahweh. And if it seem evil unto you to serve Yahweh, choose you this day whom ye will serve; whether the gods which your fathers served that were beyond the river, or the gods of the Amorites in whose land ye dwell; but as for me and my house, we will serve Yahweh." The people, with the earnest conviction which a momentary enthusiasm engenders, pledge their allegiance without hesitation. "God forbid that we should forsake Yahweh to serve other gods; He it is that brought us out of Egypt, and that has done these great things for us; therefore we also will serve Yahweh; for He is our God." But Joshua, with a clear insight into human nature, recognises the passing character of this effervescence. His reply is significant of the whole of Israel's after-history. "Ye cannot serve Yahweh; for He is

an Holy God ; He is a jealous God ; He will not forgive your transgression nor your sins. If ye forsake Yahweh and serve strange gods, then He will turn and do you evil and consume you, after that He hath done you good." "Ye cannot serve Yahweh" ; in these words are contained the key to the conflict in which Israel's religious history was ever engaged. For the worship of Yahweh demanded by Moses, Joshua and the prophets, a worship in sincerity and in truth, was suited to a people in a state of intense tension, or one whose every member was actuated by the loftiest of motives and ideals. Humdrum human nature, occupied in the commonplace routine of life, needed something more on its own plane, something which could be grasped without undue straining of the intellectual or moral faculties. Joshua's words were true, and in spite of this impressive scene the worship of teraphim, as we see in the case of David, became a commonplace of Israelitish piety, although the prophets never ceased to wield their influence against it. "Stubbornness," so run the words of Samuel's rebuke to Saul, "is as idolatry and teraphim."

But the greater danger for Israel lay in future degeneration, than in reversion to the types of the past. Every Israelite entered the promised land imbued with the firm determination that the worship of Yahweh should be kept absolutely distinct and separate from that of the Canaanite deities. It was a determination which could never in practice be carried out. During the days of the wanderings Yahweh's presence had been signified by the Tent of Meeting, which was pitched in full view of the whole host. Beside it stood the altar upon which sacrifices were to be offered. "An altar of earth thou shalt make unto Me" ; so had run Moses'

instructions, "and shalt sacrifice thereon thy burnt offerings and thy peace offerings, thy sheep and thine oxen : in every place where I record My name, I will come unto thee and I will bless thee." By this last phrase can only be understood the halting-places of the Israelitish host, which thus became spots especially sacred to Yahweh. After the entry into Canaan we read of several great national assemblies having been held at the ancient sanctuaries at Gilgal, Shechem and elsewhere, which were thus appropriated for the worship of Yahweh. Most of these in the ancient stories were connected with the names of the patriarchs, in narratives of the genuineness of which there need be no doubt. Indeed, whilst Abraham was wandering in Palestine it could have been only natural for him to visit these sanctuaries, places such as Hebron, Shechem, or Jerusalem, which had for untold ages been the great centres of Canaanitish worship.

The spot on which these assemblies were held occupied temporarily the place in which Yahweh recorded His name, and were for the time being the centre of the national worship. But this was an exceptional state of affairs, which was unable to last ; nor could the permanent establishment of the tabernacle at Shiloh maintain the old conditions. As the people became more widely scattered and disintegrated Yahweh's presence at Shiloh became meaningless to the vast majority ; though, as may be learnt from the story of Hannah, some Israelites of unusual piety were in the habit of resorting thither. But to most there was needed some visible token close at hand. On every side were to be seen, at the high places and by the fountains, the sanctuaries of the Baals, with their inseparable



adjuncts of the altar, the pillars and the Asherah, of which last the exact nature is unknown. The only course of action offered to the average Israelite, unless, like Micah, he were to revert to the ancient usage, was the imitation of this worship. Accordingly there sprang up alongside of the older sanctuaries altars to Yahweh, administered in His name. The worship of these altars was probably never very vigorous; for imitation was all that was possible to the average Israelite lacking originality of mind, and the mass of people seeing no practical difference between the worship of Yahweh and of the Baals would soon tend to desert the imitation for the reality. Only in times of great national danger and emergency would determined efforts be made to reinstate Yahweh as distinct from the local gods. So Gideon on receiving the call to battle destroyed the altar of Baal which served for the needs of his city, and erected one to Yahweh in its place. Elijah too re-erected the altar of Yahweh which had formerly existed on Mount Carmel, and which had doubtless for a considerable time been overthrown. And so from the very first settlement in Canaan there commenced a struggle between Yahweh and Baal worship, the average unthinking Israelite tending to obliterate the differences between the two, whilst the more earnest individuals possessed a lurking sense that this procedure was traitorous to the promises made by their fathers, and subversive of the well-being of the nation. Of this conflict perhaps the most enduring monument left to us is the book of Deuteronomy.

This marvellous book underwent a strange history. In the reign of Josiah, long after the Northern kingdom had passed away, an overhaul of the temple was under-



taken, in the course of which the book was unearthed. The reading of it caused a profound sensation ; and Josiah, one of the most pious of Israel's kings, at once undertook a drastic reformation of the national religion, resulting in the complete disestablishment of every local sanctuary and the centring of the whole worship in Jerusalem. The orthodox critical opinion is that the book was written an extremely short time before its so-called discovery, the whole affair being in fact a "put-up job" between the priests of Jerusalem, anxious to increase their influence and their revenues, and the religious enthusiasts of whom they took unscrupulous advantage. This is a question into which it is extremely venturesome for one who is no Hebrew scholar to enter ; yet the present writer cannot but feel profoundly dissatisfied with this conclusion. It assumes an extreme gullibility on the part of the author, and a corresponding amount of knavery on that of his instigators. For neither of these can any proof be adduced. No one on perusing the book would imagine for a moment that it could be anything else than the spontaneous outpouring of an ardent spirit, or that wire-pulling could have entered into its composition ; and if the priests of Jerusalem were guilty of such a deliberate fraud it is the only time on record in their history. Priesthoods all the world over have unfortunately become associated with the ideas of jugglery and deception ; but there is no essential connection between the two ideas, and the priests of Jerusalem always appear as honest and well-meaning, if sometimes short-sighted, men. The question then arises : Is it possible to assign any other date for the work than that currently accepted ? In answer to this it can safely be asserted that there is only one

period prior to the reign of Josiah in which the book could possibly have been produced, and that is, at the end of Solomon's reign, or towards the beginning of Rehoboam's. In order to establish any probability of the earlier in preference to the later date it would be necessary to show that the book accords with that in the religious and social conditions it presupposes, and that there then existed amongst the more earnest sections of the population an attitude of mind which would account for the production of such a book. The book commences with an exhortation put into Moses' mouth in the shape of a historical retrospect uttered immediately before the entrance into Canaan, followed by a series of legislative enactments based upon the Ten Commandments. At the forefront of this legislation is given the method of dealing with the native races of Palestine. "When Yahweh thy God shall deliver them up before thee, and thou shalt smite them, then thou shalt utterly destroy them ; thou shalt make no covenant with them, nor show mercy unto them ; ye shall break down their altars, and dash in pieces their pillars and hew down their Asherim and burn their graven images with fire." And again, later on (xx. 16), this order is enforced, "Of the cities of these peoples, thou shalt save alive nothing that breatheth ; but thou shalt utterly destroy them." Now on the supposition, a supposition which the whole tenor of the book goes to support, that the author wrote always with a strictly practical end in view, these verses can only have been written when the original inhabitants were still to some extent separable from the Israelites, and constituted a danger which might still be rooted out. During the period of the Judges the Canaanite cities which had not been destroyed remained

as independent townships, forming an ever-present menace to the Israelites. David seems to have subdued these cities, but under him they mostly retained their identity, ranking with the other dependent states which were included in his empire. Not until the reign of Solomon were they brought under the harrow, forced levies of them being raised as workmen under the superintendence of Israelitish officers for the carrying-out of Solomon's state schemes. Although no statement to this effect is to be found in our authorities, it is scarcely possible to doubt that these subdued Canaanites were insufficient in number to provide all the labour required, and that the lower classes of the Israelites were accordingly drawn upon as well. This would tend to a rapid amalgamation between the two peoples; and whether the above hypothesis is correct or not we know that such an amalgamation must have taken place. After Rehoboam's accession we hear no more of Canaanites and Israelites. It is the people of Israel alone who complain of their burdens, who rebel and set up a king of their own. After this time the command to destroy the Canaanites and the Amorites would be a mere piece of picturesque archaism. In the days of the later prophets the two worships, like the two peoples, had become merged in one. The prophets found, not a worship of Yahweh, which was tending to be extinguished by a worship of the Baals, but a so-called universal Yahweh worship which was nothing else than the worship of the Baals under a different name. In these circumstances they did not plead for an absolute abolition of Baal worship, but for a reformation in spirit and truth of the cult of Yahweh. This argument, it is true, may be made to cut both ways; indeed the writer

strongly feels that this objection can be forcibly brought to bear upon every reason which may be adduced to support an early date for this enigmatical book. It is possible that by the continual preaching of a succession of prophets it had been borne in upon the consciousness of the Israelites that their popular religion was none other than the old Canaanitish worship, and as such must be destroyed. If this were so the injunctions quoted above would still at the later date be intelligible and reasonable. A safer argument on our side is that the book reflects the social and political position of Israel towards the end of Solomon's reign. At that period Israel's glory was passing away; the subject kingdoms were everywhere slipping from her grasp; and the confident belief that Yahweh's promises to Abraham and to Moses had been fulfilled in the establishment of a permanent Israelitish empire which should stand on terms of brotherly equality with the great empires of Babylonia and Egypt was proving illusory. The author's mind is imbued with the material thoughts which the idea of empire had engendered, but yet he sees that the Davidic empire was in the nature of things transient and will never be renewed. Under these circumstances Yahweh will fulfil His promises by the gift of prosperity to Israel, a prosperity which she will be enabled to enjoy without the necessity for territorial expansion. The thought that Yahweh's promises did not include lordship over the surrounding nations seems to be clearly implied in Moses' instructions before entering upon the final campaign. "Ye are to pass through the border of your brethren, the children of Esau, which dwell in Seir: contend not with them; for I will not give you of their land, no, not so much as for

the sole of the foot to tread on : because I have given Mount Seir unto Esau for a possession." So again, for the same reasons, neither Moab nor Ammon are to be troubled. Israel's pre-eminence is to be moral rather than political ; she is to be the envy of the peoples around. " This is your wisdom and your understanding in the sight of the peoples, which shall say, ' Surely this great nation is a wise and understanding people.' " The very application of the epithet " great " could have seemed but a miserable parody in Josiah's day, when the more important half of the nation had disappeared for ever, and the kingdom had been for over a hundred years tossed, so to speak, backwards and forwards between Egypt and Assyria. On the other hand it would well illustrate the national pride which David's successes had aroused, and which subsequent disaster was unable to annihilate entirely. Great economic prosperity then, accompanied by universal justice and happiness is to be Israel's reward if she is true to the service of Yahweh ; otherwise disaster will follow upon disaster, in the field and in the home ; until Israel will be utterly consumed by her enemies, a byword and a reproach to the nations.

But how is this service of Yahweh to be performed ? In the answer to this question lies the greatest interest of the book. For the Deuteronomist is no dreamer ; he is a practical legislator. He is not, like the prophets, an idealist who appears to be baffled continually in the vain endeavour to create new human nature out of old ; he, on the contrary, takes human nature at its own valuation, and endeavours to establish the religion of Yahweh upon a sound working basis. His enactments for this purpose conveniently fall into two classes, those



of a specifically religious nature, and those dealing with social conditions. In considering the religious problem he saw plainly that Yahweh and Baal worship were unable to exist side by side ; the older must inevitably oust the younger. His solution was to prohibit the worship of Yahweh under any forms whatever at the local shrines, but to centre it all at the temple at Jerusalem. Hither Yahweh's subjects were to repair at stated periods in order to establish their connection with the national deity. It is generally taken for granted that this idea of one central sanctuary is necessarily late, and the result of a lengthy development of Israel's religion. So far is this from being the case that the proposal is not an innovation at all, but simply an attempt to revert under changed conditions to a state of affairs which had formerly existed. During the wanderings it had been obvious and natural to possess one sanctuary only of Yahweh, in every place where He had recorded His name. The Deuteronomist simply attempted to mark Jerusalem as the last of such places, the final spot upon which God's name was to rest. This step could not have been thoroughly carried out without danger of a social upheaval, perhaps of a serious nature. Bound up with the worship at the local shrines were all the social amenities which went towards the making of the joyous life of ancient Israel, the village feasts and family gatherings which took place in the time of Saul and David. On these festive occasions the spare vegetable diet which had been inherited from the nomadic mode of life was supplemented by the luxury of animal flesh which had first been offered to Yahweh, and was then enjoyed by His worshippers. Our legislator was a wise enough politician to see that



these could not possibly be put to an end ; he therefore cut the knot by secularising them completely. The meat was still to be eaten on such occasions, but the act was to be bereft of all religious significance. In his zeal the Deuteronomist was utterly blind to the dangers of the situation. If his precepts had been carried out in their full intention, nothing could have prevented the total divorce of the mass of the nation from all religion at all, as indeed did happen in later times, and the consequent withering of the national life. The people, thus precluded from all ritual acts except on the rare occasion of a visit to the capital, were to serve Yahweh all the more fervently in the social and moral sphere. Justice was to be established, care was to be taken of the poor, no man was to grind down his neighbour. It is in this matter that the arguments for an early date are strongest. One after another the prophets had thundered against social inequality, the gathering of wealth in the hands of a few, the consequent degradation and even subsequent slavery of the poor. On the critical hypothesis our book is a résumé of the prophetic teaching, an attempt to bring that teaching down to the realm of practice. When confronted with the social state described by Amos or Isaiah, the luxury and selfish thoughtlessness of the rich, the relaxing amongst the upper classes of all bonds of moral and social obligation, how miserably inadequate must his advice have seemed to the writer himself. We have seen that he was essentially a practical man, and yet in order to cure these widespread, deeply-rooted evils he thinks it sufficient to appeal to what must have been by that time an extremely feeble sentiment. " If there be with thee a poor man within any of thy gates

in thy land which Yahweh thy God giveth thee, thou shalt not harden thine heart nor shut thy hand from thy poor brother: but thou shalt surely open thine hand unto him, and shalt surely lend him sufficient for his need. For the poor shall never cease out of the land; therefore I command thee saying, thou shalt surely open thine hand unto thy brother, to thy needy, and to thy poor, in thy land." "The poor shall never cease out of the land." What a needless, one might almost say fatuous, piece of information to be addressed to those very persons of whom Isaiah had said, "Thy princes are rebellious, and companions of thieves; every one loveth gifts and followeth after rewards: they judge not the fatherless, neither doth the cause of the widow come unto them"; or of whom Jeremiah, almost simultaneously with the supposed writing of the book, uttered the words, "As a cage is full of birds, so are their houses full of deceit: therefore they are become great and waxen rich." If, on the other hand, we imagine that to the writer and his readers poverty was a new and somewhat inexplicable phenomenon, the whole force of the passage above quoted becomes evident. The ruling classes of society have not yet lost, though they may be beginning to do so, the patriarchal point of view which bound themselves up closely with the welfare of their humbler followers; the author feels that they may be drifting in the wrong direction, namely, towards selfishness and luxury, but believes that a well-timed appeal to their noblest sentiments will set this right.

The Book of Deuteronomy upon a first reading could never be judged other than as an exceptionally able and vigorous work, produced by a man of great force of

character for the purpose of grappling with a complex situation, with the intricacies of which he is well acquainted. As a summing-up of the prophetic teaching it must lose this character; in this case in fact the greater number of its proposals must be deemed feeble in the extreme. The only one of any importance could have been the establishment of the central sanctuary; and this was indeed the single point towards which Josiah directed his energies. How the book came to be lost in the temple precincts is a matter upon which we are totally in the dark. That its effect upon its contemporaries was small is another fact for which we must rely upon conjecture only. The book in fact represents the last charge of the Guards; its author, in spite of his bold exterior, is the exponent of a forlorn hope. In spite of his passionate entreaties, Yahweh worship, as popularly understood, became merged in Baal worship, until the separation was again effected by the action of the great prophets; and the secession of the Northern tribes once and for all put an end to the ideal of a national worship, centring round Jerusalem. There is indeed evidence to show that this ideal was widely held at the time of the secession, and never afterwards completely disappeared. It was to safeguard his kingdom against the attractions of Jerusalem that Jeroboam instituted his rival official shrines of Bethel and Dan; and two kings of Judah, Asa and Hezekiah, before the reign of Josiah, made attempts to suppress the local worship. Israel's history under the kings is thus marked by the gradual weakening of the resolution, originally firmly held by every Israelite, that the worship of Yahweh should be kept absolutely distinct from that of the Canaanitish Baalim. Three influences were at work

simultaneously tending in this same direction—that of the need when the central sanctuary was out of sight, and the tension of war relaxed, for some outlet for the primal emotions of an agricultural people; the rapid disappearance during the reign of Solomon of the Canaanites as a distinct race; and the secession of the Northern kingdom, which once for all shattered all hope of a united national religion.

The prevalent modern tendency is towards the white-washing of Jeroboam the son of Nebat, on the ground that he did nothing which could have shocked any of his contemporaries. This position can scarcely be maintained. The worship of Bethel and Dan, with its molten calves, and other concomitants which were doubtless soon attracted towards it, could only have been regarded from the prophetic standpoint, and this never entirely died out, as a degradation of the service of Yahweh. The prophets of Yahweh from Moses onwards wished religion to be felt as an inward inspiration; but since this was a state to which ordinary individuals could attain only in moments of great enthusiasm, the energy of the prophets was directed as a rule towards the simplification of worship. This had to be based upon the primitive Semitic institutions; but in their dealing with them the prophets and their followers, such as the author of Deuteronomy, always took up a thoroughly puritanical attitude. The only objection to this view which can seriously be considered is that Elijah has left us no polemic against the worship of Yahweh which in his day was commonly accepted in the Northern kingdom. But Elijah's position was peculiar. At the moment of his dramatic entrance upon the stage of history the King of Israel had contracted a marriage

with the royal house of Phœnicia. The Phœnician sovereign, probably with a view to the final incorporation of Israel within his own dominions, was conducting, through the agency of his daughter Jezebel, an energetic campaign, which had for its purpose the complete abolition of the worship of Yahweh under any form whatever, and the substitution of that of the Phœnician Baal, Melkarth. Under these circumstances, fraught with the utmost danger to the national existence, as well as to its worship, Elijah, imbued as he was with the full prophetic inspiration of Yahweh, found all his energies necessarily concentrated upon the task of preserving the worship of Yahweh, however corrupt its accepted forms might be.

It is unnecessary to describe at any length the detailed history of the two kingdoms after the break-up. As a result of this division, and the gradual loss of all the subject states, Israel and Judah became, to speak generally, neither more nor less strong than the numerous small nations around them. Israel's bitterest foe was the kingdom of Damascus, with which an intermittent war was carried on; in this the Syrians were, on the whole, successful, the Israelitish kings being gradually deprived of all their possessions east of Jordan. But behind all these minor affrays there was looming, like a threatening thunder-cloud upon the horizon, the power of Assyria. Asshur, the original capital of Assyria, which was afterwards supplanted by Nineveh, situated upon the northern reaches of the Tigris, was originally a colony from Babylon, and the Assyrians seem to have inherited a double share of the Babylonian genius for war, whilst lacking much of their cultured and artistic taste. The Assyrian imagination was fired by the



exploit of the first great ruler of Northern Babylonia Sargon, King of Accad (about 4000 B.C.), who is said to have extended his empire over Elam to the East, and over Syria and Palestine even as far as Cyprus to the West. It was the object in life of one great Assyrian ruler after another to emulate this progenitor; and the annals of their reigns are continually occupied by a series of campaigns now against the Elamites to the East, now against the nations of Syria to the West. On these campaigns the Assyrian kings usually showed great astuteness in playing off one nation against another. Advantage was taken of an internecine conflict to crush completely the one party, and to demand tribute in return for the protection thus afforded from the other. The tribute having been paid, the subject nations were as a rule left to manage their own affairs, acknowledging the general overlordship of Assyria, and being liable to provide military contingents for the Imperial armies when called upon so to do. It is easy to see that the Assyrian monarchs never formed an empire in the true sense of the word; their sovereignty simply extended over a group of inferior states loosely strung together by fear of the military force which could be brought against them. Any sign of internal weakness on the part of a central power was the certain signal for a general revolt; and as a rule the realms subjugated by one monarch had to be completely reconquered by his successor. The first contact between the Israelites and the Assyrians seems to have taken place in B.C. 853 at the battle of Qarquara, in which coalition of Syrian monarchs, including Ahab of Israel, were disastrously defeated by Shalmaneser II. During the years which followed, Damascus, situated as it was



exactly between Palestine and Assyria, bore the brunt of the attack, being thereby gradually weakened. Shalmaneser III. (781-773) brought the fortunes of the hardy Syrians to the very lowest ebb ; and the power of Assyria suffering eclipse for a short time, Israel was enabled to avenge her wrongs and once more grind her neighbour beneath her heel. This took place in the reign of Jeroboam II., under whose sway the ancient glories of David seemed to have almost returned. " He restored the border of Israel from the entering in of Hamath unto the sea of the Arabah." Judah also, during Uzziah's long reign, shared the prosperity occasioned by this respite. " God helped Uzziah against the Philistines, and against the Arabians that dwell in Gur-baal, and the Meunim. And the Ammonites gave gifts to Uzziah ; and his name spread abroad even to the entering in of Egypt ; for he waxed exceeding strong." In this common prosperity it is possible to see how closely intertwined were the fortunes of the two kingdoms of Israel and Judah ; indeed, the fortune of the latter may be almost said to have reflected that of the former. Judah's position indeed was one of peculiar isolation. Bounded on the south and east by the desert steppes of the Negeb or South Country and by the Dead Sea, on her west lay the great maritime plain of the Shephelah, along which marched the armies of Assyria and of Egypt, but from which there was little to tempt them to turn aside in order to ascend one of the difficult defiles leading up the mountain chain which blocked their view to the East. Practically her only line of contact with the outside world thus lay along her northern frontier, where indeed owing to the absence of natural barriers the line of demarcation between the two

kingdoms was of an extremely uncertain character. The kingdom of Israel on the other hand was inevitably involved in the whirl of racial strife. Her provinces east of Jordan afforded a continuous bone of contention between her and Damascus ; and in her realms lay the valley of Jezreel or Megiddo, the spot upon which converged the hostile armies of the Semitic world, and which so impressed the imagination that under the name of Armageddon it has come to signify the final clash of the powers which rule the universe. In this way it can be understood how the impulse of any severe blow dealt to the kingdom of Israel would be at once felt by Judah, and how again an increase of the former's expansive power would likewise be communicated to the sister kingdom.

## CHAPTER IV.

### THE PROPHETIC AGE.

THE years which witnessed the return of some measure of Israel's prosperity witnessed also the beginning of a new prophetic era, an era in which the prophets of Yahweh were to develop an energy and force immeasurably superior to any possessed by them before. It has already been seen that with changing circumstances the position held by the prophets also changed. The earliest, men like Moses, Joshua, and, in a less marked degree, the other judges, had been political leaders as well as advisors of the people. In their days, anarchic, as they may well be called, when the patriarchal system was outgrown, but no more permanent institutions had been developed in order to supply its place, the strong man naturally took the reins. And the prophet was always the strong man ; his force of character gave him an undisputed title to rule and lead the people, to settle their disputes and conduct their campaigns. With the institution of the kingship this underwent a complete change. The king now became, for better or for worse, the head and representative of the realm. By divine right he was the commander-in-chief of the forces, the arbiter of peace and war, and the initial source whence all justice flowed. The prophets were relegated to a private, but none the less powerful position, such a position as that we have already seen occupied by Nathan and Gad. As the monarchy, which had originally depended for its strength upon the goodwill and affection of the people, developed into an Oriental despotism, the

prerogatives enjoyed by the prophets were felt to be in the nature of an usurpation of royal rights. When the king's will became law, when his word had only to be uttered in order to secure obedience, when his courtiers hung on his every syllable in fear and trembling, he was little likely to find to his taste the advice of an individual who respected no persons, and in his own sphere admitted no masters. Yet such was the position secured by the energy of successive prophets, and burned deep into the consciousness of the people that no king ever felt himself strong enough to put them aside entirely.

The difficulty was partly surmounted by the creation of false prophets, men who to the uncritical eye appeared to wield the sceptre of the prophets of old, but who were in reality but slavish hangers-on, prepared to follow the monarch's every whim. The real prophets of Yahweh were by this means thrust more and more into the background, and their attempts to assert themselves could even be made to appear as unwarranted aggressions, and plots to undermine the credit of those whose vocation was assured. For some time they continued, so to speak, on sufferance, their advice being asked, but not followed, and stringent penalties being their reward when it was not to the king's liking. By the reign of Jeroboam II. even this position seems to have been lost, and prophecy of the true Israelitish type to have altogether disappeared. There is no evidence to show that even the second-rate type of false prophet still existed in the Northern court. The two great men, Amos and Hosea, who heralded the resurrection of prophecy, could claim no hearing of royalty. It was avowedly their sworn foe, and their appeal was to the people of Israel taken as a whole. They did not walk

at the king's right hand, his guides and counsellors ; but their voices were raised in the street, in the market-place, and at the religious gathering. They feared not the persons of kings or courtiers, but from constraint of circumstances they were compelled to hurl their denunciations from without rather than within. In the Southern kingdom matters do not appear to have developed so far. Partly no doubt owing to its peculiar isolation the government of Judah was of a most stable character. Whilst in the kingdom of Israel dynasty followed dynasty, each established upon the blood of its predecessor, in Judah the sons of David reigned with scarcely a break in due succession. The presence of the temple at Jerusalem and of the old-established priesthood, which being largely independent of the goodwill of the reigning monarch, and imbued strongly with loyalty towards the lineage of David tended always towards conservatism and stability, was of great importance in this connexion. The kings having this support behind them, and not, like the Northern upstarts, being compelled to rely solely upon their own powers and attractions, were much more inclined than the latter to be of a pious turn of mind. Although some, brooking no restraint, imitated all the worst religious excesses into which the Northern kingdom had drifted, others were animated by a genuine zeal for the purity of the worship of Yahweh, and by loyalty to the early traditions of their house. So in the Southern kingdom there was always left more scope for the energy of the prophets than in the Northern, and it is not surprising to find Isaiah, in his first appearance upon the public stage, being looked upon with respect as one possessing a right to assert his opinion, even though that opinion

is not acceptable to the weak-minded Ahaz. But whether, like Amos, the prophets were sprung from a solitary country occupation where, in quiet retirement, their thoughts had been enabled to roam over the whole range of humanity ; or whether, like Isaiah, they felt themselves at home amidst the pomp of court life and in the busy thoroughfares of the capital, their message to their age was essentially one and the same. It consisted in a demand for the return to Yahweh from the worship of the Baalim ; and this return was to be signalled by a restoration of social justice, of obedience to Yahweh in sincerity and in truth. As the prophets looked at the state of society around them they found it, in spite of the transient flush of military prosperity, rotten to the core. On the one hand was a wealthy, aristocratic class, abandoned to enjoyment, and bereft of all sense of social obligation ; the other a poverty-stricken proletariat maintaining with the utmost exertion mere subsistence and independence as against the encroachments of the rich. " They have sold the righteous for silver, and the needy for a pair of shoes ; that pant after the dust of the earth on the head of the poor, and turn aside the way of the meek." " Woe unto them that decree unrighteous decrees, and to the writers that write perverseness : to turn aside the needy from judgment, and to take away the right of the poor of My people, that widows may be their spoil, and that they may make the fatherless their prey." The prophets in both kingdoms and in succeeding generations are in such complete agreement over this point that it is impossible to accuse them of exaggeration ; it is, however, worth while enquiring at short length how this state of affairs had come to pass.



In the patriarchal age, the days of Abraham, of Isaac, and of Jacob, Hebrew life had been simple. The tribe constituted a unity under the leadership of its patriarch. The flocks and herds, the sheep, goats and oxen, upon which these nomads depended for their whole sustenance, were the property of the tribe ; individual rights were unknown. Each man's personal belongings consisted merely of his tent and other simple necessities of life which he was able to carry about with him. Possessed of no landed property, the whole earth was potentially theirs, that large portion of it at least which the agricultural nations had not brought under cultivation. Often their camp was pitched by some spring or well whose water clothed with verdure the country around ; often they were dependent upon the rains of heaven for grass for the pasturage of their flocks. All disputes between man and man were referred to the patriarch for settlement. He was, in the true sense of the word, the father of his people. No social distinctions separated him from his followers. His pursuits were their pursuits, and his manner of life was the same as theirs. His following was not so large but that he was able to know personally every individual within it. Three hundred and eighteen is said to have been the number of fighting men whom Abraham had at his command ; and on this reckoning the whole adult muster of the tribe, including women and servants, could scarcely have been more than a thousand. In this primitive community there was scope for a loyal emotional attachment to the leader, of a nature altogether different from and more powerful than any which can bind the average member of a more highly developed society to his monarch, separated as they are by a chasm which seems almost impassable.

In the Russian peasant's passionate devotion to the Czar was to be seen the survival of the primitive nomad days, when the "little father" was one of his people, and himself shared their life and thought. This patriarchal system subsisted during the residence in Egypt, underwent a cloud when the Israelites were converted into forced labourers for the Pharaohs, and was revived with the renewal of national hope and energy under Moses. Moses, by natural right, stepped into the room of Abraham, and became the Hebrew leader and father. But the nation had outgrown this primitive system, and the mere settling of the disputes which continually arose in the Israelitish host was found to be beyond the powers of one man. In a striking passage (Ex. xviii. 13-27) we are shown how Moses was persuaded by Jethro his father-in-law to delegate part of his authority to able subordinates. "And Moses chose able men out of all Israel, and made them heads over the people, rulers of thousands, rulers of hundreds, rulers of fifties, and rulers of tens. And they judged the people at all seasons; the hard cases they brought unto Moses, but every small matter they judged themselves." The men so selected, we must suppose, were naturally those who occupied already an eminent position, the "heads of fathers' houses" who were suited by the prestige already attaching to them for the office of sub-patriarchs. It was in all probability owing to this simple organisation, the result of one man's shrewd advice, that Israel's nationality was preserved during the stormy age which succeeded the conquest of Canaan. The patriarchal head of the nation disappeared from view except when inadequately represented by a local judge and deliverer, but his subordinates remained to

administer rude justice in their several localities. The conquered territory was doubtless roughly portioned out amongst the Israelite heads of families, and the main business of each one of these was the cultivation of his own particular plot of ground. But self-defence, if no other motives were present, would be sufficient to cause these farmers to congregate in villages or in the conquered Canaanitish towns ; and such towns or villages would become centres for the country round, markets for the distribution of produce, and courts where the elders in the gate could administer justice to the rural inhabitants. Had Israel been allowed to settle undisturbed by exterior foes her nationality would almost certainly have been lost, and each of these townships would have developed into an independent city with a monarch of its own, essentially similar to the displaced Canaanite communities. But pressure from without preserved and consolidated the feeling of national unity just when it seemed in most imminent danger of dissolution. In the person of the king the local courts were once more co-ordinated ; he resumed the patriarchal position as supreme judge and leader of the people ; and to him the local justices were bound to refer disputes which defied their efforts at settlement. " If there arise a matter too hard for thee in judgment," so runs the legislation of Deuteronomy, " then shalt thou arise and get thee up unto the place which Yahweh thy God shall choose ; and thou shalt come unto the priests, the Levites, and the judge that shall be in those days." The judge, who stands behind the priests and represents the final acme of justice, can only be the king himself. Saul and David were kings of the true patriarchal type. As leaders they depended upon the willing

support of their people, and as administrators of justice they were bound to deal fairly and equitably. It was indeed David's laxness in this latter respect which nearly caused him the loss of his throne by the rebellion of Absalom. The transition from patriarch to despot was made by Solomon. David indeed, towards the close of his reign, may have inaugurated the change ; and his numbering of the people, the popular and prophetic opposition to which seems so inexplicable to the unenlightened reader, must have represented a first attempt to convert a free people into a number of serfs, existing only for the benefit of their sovereign. Solomon completed the change. Actuated probably at first, as his reputation for wisdom shows, by the highest motives for the good of his people, he was yet soon tempted to forget the fundamental basis upon which his kingship rested, and to employ the power at his command simply for the aggrandisement of his own wealth. The building of the great temple, and of the still more gorgeous "house of the forest of Lebanon," the accumulation of gold, silver and ivory, of artistic work and of personal adornment, became the main object of Solomon's life. All of these constituted a severe drain upon the resources of the kingdom. At the close of David's conquests Israel had enjoyed a period of unexampled peace and prosperity, when they sat every man under his vine and under his fig-tree. The productive powers of the earth, utilised to their utmost by the energetic sons of the soil, brought forth a more abundant crop of the necessities of life, of corn, wine and oil, than was needed for the immediate consumption of the frugal Israelites. This superabundance enabled Solomon's schemes to be prosecuted without any visible evil effects following for a consider-

able period. Labour could be withdrawn from the land, and there would still be sufficient left to feed the whole people and to repay in kind the services proffered by Hiram, king of Tyre, and his skilled artisans. So long as the pinch was not felt, the mass of the people could have been inspired only by admiration for a prince who so enhanced the glory and magnificence of his country, who dazzled the imagination of his subjects, and compelled the admiration of the most distant realms. It is this feeling which is reflected in the history of the first part of Solomon's reign (I. Kings ii.-x.), and nothing could be more significant of the care which the historian has employed in order to collect contemporary documents than the change of tone which is so marked in the succeeding chapters. With the royal expense steadily on the increase there was bound to come a time when the national produce would fail to meet the demands made upon it, and the impoverishment of the people would necessarily follow. This happened towards the close of Solomon's reign. As more and more labour was withdrawn from the land, so its productive powers were diminished continually, until the wherewithal to repay Hiram was not forthcoming, and Solomon was reduced to the ignominious expedient of ceding twenty of his Northerly cities to the Phœnician. These cities moreover were not to Hiram's liking, and a distinct cooling-off of the friendship between the two monarchs probably marked the beginning of the decline of Solomon's glory. This, however, was but an affair of state, and would scarcely have been noticed by the mass of the population. Not until the resources of the land were so seriously crippled that the people became in danger of actual want, could

any serious disaffection have set in. When by hard labour, combined with a decreasing quality of the good things of life, the Israelite began to grow discontented with his lot, the royal pomp and magnificence must have ceased to sway by its glamour his imagination ; and it can easily be understood how the popular attitude towards Solomon underwent a radical change. He became the oppressor instead of the idol of his people.

The disaffection, however, did not come to a head until his son Rehoboam ascended the throne. The people of Israel for the last time asserted their sovereign right, and elected a king of their own, Judah and Benjamin alone remaining faithful to the memory of David. The question at issue between Rehoboam and the recalcitrant Israelites was simply whether he was to be a king of the old patriarchal and constitutional type, or a commonplace Oriental despot. This point was clearly grasped by the old men who had lived through the preceding reign, and had no doubt watched with sad misgiving the trend of the times. "They spake unto him, saying, 'If thou wilt be a servant unto this people this day and wilt serve them and answer them and speak good words to them, then they will be thy servants for ever.' " Rehoboam, whose outlook, owing to the nature of his upbringing amidst the pomp of royalty, scarcely extended beyond the gratification of his own pleasures and the enhancement of his own glory, was unable to appreciate this advice. He preferred, with results disastrous to his kingdom, to act the part of an irresponsible tyrant. The outcome was scarcely less disastrous to the revolutionaries. Owing to their circumstances and to the degrading effects of Solomon's reign, they were unable to support the liberty they



claimed, and were effectually ground beneath the heel of the king they had elected.

Far better would it have been for Israel as a whole to have remained beneath the stable government of the house of David. In spite of Rehoboam's ambition, the wild extravagance of Solomon could not be maintained ; a time of recuperation was absolutely essential if the country was to regain any of its material prosperity. In the Northern kingdom, whose position, in spite of seeming strength, was always the more unsound of the two, large amounts of the public money were probably employed upon the adorning of the royal capitals of Tirzah and Samaria ; but in Judah no further outlays seem to have been incurred. Indeed, in the latter kingdom the wealth accumulated by Solomon served as a standing capital which was gradually depleted to meet national emergencies. But if Solomon's extravagance might by careful management have been discounted, his reign had left a legacy to the country which constituted an ever severer strain upon its resources. This was effected by the creation of a new class hitherto non-existent, that is the military, aristocratic class who clustered around the court, served as the king's main support, and in return drew from him, or rather, from the public revenues, their sustenance. The royal family, the officers of the standing army, the overseers of the public works, the priests, the official recorders, all went to the making of this new class, bound to supersede in power and influence the old patriarchal nobility, from which it differed in almost every particular. The latter were naturally reduced to a subordinate position. as mere farmers of the land, whilst the whole management of the country fell into the hands of the former.

The extinction of the patriarchal influence is most strikingly shown in the election by the seceded Israelites, not of one of the old nobility, but of one of the new upstarts, a young man who had been given by Solomon an important public post. This step determined the whole of the after-history of the Northern kingdom. The king and his retainers having little to think of beyond their own immediate advantage, jealousy and dissension were rife. Dynasty followed dynasty in rapid succession, each new monarch mounting upon the slaughter of the supporters of his forerunner. Nadab, the son of Jeroboam, was murdered by Baasha, along with the whole of his father's house. The upstart's son suffered the same fate at the hands of Zimri, captain of half his chariots. The Israelitish army, which was then in the field, hearing of this move, crowned Omri, the commander-in-chief, as king. Although little is told us in the Bible of this monarch, the Assyrian records have shown that he was one of the most capable of Israel's sovereigns ; indeed, long after his death the Northern kingdom was known to Assyria as " the land of Omri." This dynasty lasted until its bloody extirpation at the hands of Jehu, of whose line came Jeroboam II., under whose sway, as we have seen, Israel regained some slight measure of prosperity. In all these revolutions the mass of the people acted only as spectators. In some, notably in the case of Omri, the army, like the Roman legions, played an important part ; but this is to be ascribed to the standing force, rather than to the levy of the people of Israel. To them the successive changes were like the shifting scenes of a drama, whose inner machinery they were unable to understand. In the meanwhile the impoverishment of the country went on

apace, in the Northern more rapidly than in the Southern kingdom. The new aristocrats had no interest in the prosperity of their fellows, such as had been felt by the old patriarchs. No doubt they heartily despised the plodding countrymen, and looked at him as a being moving in a totally different sphere from their own. Yet, ignorant though they might be of the fact, upon the countryman they were entirely dependent, and his ruin meant their's in a short space of time. As more and more taxes were required both to pay off foreign conquerors and to maintain the aristocratic splendour, the farmer became unable to meet his debts, and his land or even his person forthwith fell into the hands of the wealthy. This process was probably effected by magnanimous loans on the part of the leisured rich, which enabled the farmer to survive the immediate crisis, but as certainly in the future drew him irretrievably into the snare. The old independent Israelite was in imminent danger of becoming the slave of the wealthy, like the villains of early European history. It was at this juncture, with the rich too well-off and self-satisfied to be able even to see that anything was wrong, the poor too crushed and disheartened to think of bettering themselves, that the prophets came forward. With unerring instinct they laid their finger upon the weak spot. Although we are apt to think of them as men guided by the wild impulse of emotion, it must be acceded that their intuitions were absolutely true, and that, without the aid of scientific investigation, they knew beforehand the elements of Political Economy as enunciated by Adam Smith. The whole productive power of the country resided in its agriculture. With this in a flourishing condition all would go well. The

sturdy farmer, with his mind intent on getting the most out of his land, formed the backbone of the country ; and if he were only allowed to thrive no permanent harm could come. As he was being deprived of all encouragement and all joy in his work, and compelled moreover to maintain a large and voracious army of unproductive labourers, his heart was being crushed out of him, and the vital energy of the community in consequence dissipated. How did the prophets propose to remedy this state of affairs ? It is at this point that they lay themselves open to the charge, which has oftentimes been levelled against them, of impractical idealism. Their plea was for righteousness and justice, for equity and fellow-feeling between man and man. " Wash you, make you clean ; put away the evil of your doings from before Mine eyes ; cease to do evil ; learn to do well ; seek judgment, relieve the oppressed, judge the fatherless, plead for the widow." With a passionate eagerness they looked forward, everyone of them, to a time when these virtues would be exercised by all, and when the glories of the old days of David would be restored. From Amos to Ezekiel every prophet expresses the same hope, the outlook of each being tempered by his own particular individuality. Amos, a prophet of the shrewdest common-sense, but of stern puritanical principles and little poetic imagination, turns rather to the material side of the picture, to the old agricultural prosperity restored. " Behold the days come that the plowman shall overtake the reaper, and the treader of grapes him that soweth seed ; and the mountains shall drop sweet wine and all the hills shall melt. And I will plant My people upon their land, and they shall no more be plucked up out of their land which I have given them." To

Hosea's emotional temperament the predominating thought is that of God's love and mercy, which He will rain down freely for the refreshing of His people. "I will heal their backsliding, I will love them freely; for Mine anger is turned away from them. I will be as the dew unto Israel; he shall blossom as the lily and cast forth his roots as Lebanon." Isaiah again, the stately courtier with the intense soul of a poet, describes in glowing language the central figure of the Davidic king from whom will radiate justice and prosperity for all His people. "Unto us a child is born, unto us a son is given: and the government shall be upon His shoulder; and His name shall be called Wonderful, Counsellor, Mighty God, Father of Eternity, Prince of Peace. Of the increase of His government and of peace there shall be no end, upon the throne of David, and upon His kingdom, to establish it, and to uphold it with judgment and with righteousness from henceforth even for ever." Micah, a man of the people, is more akin in his general line of thought to Amos, but, as a true Judaite, his ideas, like those of Isaiah, are centred around the forthcoming ruler. "He shall stand and shall feed His flock in the strength of Yahweh, in the majesty of the name of Yahweh His God; and they shall abide: for now shall He be great unto the ends of the earth. And this man shall be our peace, and He shall deliver us from the Assyrian." Jeremiah's forecast is not concerned principally with forms of government, or the administration of justice. The desired change is to come from within rather than from without, it is to spring from the heart of every individual Israelite, who will at all times feel and welcome the divine promptings within him. "This is the covenant that I will make with the house of Israel

after those days, saith Yahweh ; I will put My law in their inward parts, and in their heart will I write it : and I will be their God, and they shall be My people ; and they shall teach no more every man his neighbour, and every man his brother, saying ' Know Yahweh ' ; for they shall all know Me from the least of them unto the greatest of them, saith the Lord." Ezekiel, the last of the old, and the first of a new type of prophets, as the most unidealistic, so in a certain sense the most practical of them all, thinks simply of a national revival, such as did actually take place, when Israel will put away strange Gods, and centre its thoughts on Yahweh alone. " And I will give them one heart, and I will put a new spirit within you ; and I will take the stony heart out of their flesh, and will give them a heart of flesh : that they may walk in My statutes and keep Mine ordinances and do them : and they shall be My people, and I will be their God." But how was this much-desired result to be brought about ? The prophets, up to the time of Ezekiel, had no practical measures whatever to suggest. " Justice, righteousness, mercy," such was in effect their cry, a cry which has been echoed by ardent souls in every stage of the world's history, " let every man practise these, and all will be well. The golden age will have arrived." " He hath shewed thee, O man, what is good ; and what doth the Lord require of thee but to do justly, and to love mercy, and to walk humbly with thy God ? " He is a poor creature who does not feel in contact with such words as these the stirring of noble ideals within him. But simultaneously there arises the sense of a vague dissatisfaction, an incongruity which he fails to understand. Attempt as a man may to practise these ideals, he finds himself baffled



at every turn. Nothing, one would think, could be easier than for a high-minded man to do justly, and to love mercy ; nothing in reality turns out to be more difficult. Some reason there must be for this never-ceasing conflict between the real and the ideal ; some reason, that is to say, which goes deeper than the mere redundant statement that the real and the ideal always must conflict. The reason seems to lie in the fact that those upon whose natures the appeal to justice, righteousness, and mercy makes the noblest and deepest impression do not really know what these words mean ; it may indeed be said that the prophets themselves did not know what their words meant. The words had been coined in an early stage of society, and carried forward as correct currency into one more complicated, in which man's relation to man was intricate and varied. Justice, in the patriarchal days, had meant simply the " being fair." Two men come to you with a dispute over some matter of everyday life, you listen to them, and you understand them. Your mode of life is the same as theirs, and the things which are troubling them might any moment trouble you. By your shrewd insight you are able to see how things lie ; and if one man seems to be deliberately minded to wrong his neighbour, you condemn him ; but if both are equally well meaning, you arbitrate between them, and by the use of tact and sympathy you are able to re-create friendly feeling all round. This is the only true justice ; and righteousness is its correlative. Righteousness means " being in the right," so that the patriarchal judge before whom you refer your dispute will see that you are honest and well-meaning, that you are making no attempt to defraud your neighbour, but simply wish to be fair and square

with him. Mercy again is something deeper and more inspiring than either of these two. It means the fellow-feeling which prompts a man to sympathy and help at the sight of suffering and distress. It is impossible to analyse thoroughly the constituents of this or any other state of feeling ; but a large part is doubtless governed by the thought that one day we may be ourselves in similar circumstances, and shall be glad of a similar aid. For the full exercise of this fellow-feeling it is manifestly necessary that men should be able to enter into the modes of one another's life. The further removed are two men in habits of life and manner of thought, the less fellow-feeling can there be between them. For our intimate friends a slight trouble is sufficient to arouse our whole sympathy ; but for men of a different class, or whose interests are not the same as our own, some deeper calamity is needed, extending down to the very bed-rock of human nature. In ancient Israel it was accounted a merciful act to return your neighbour's ox when you found it going astray. Yet a townsman walking in the country would see such an ox in its wanderings, and would take no steps to deal with it, not because he lacked mercy, but because he lacked understanding. To him the ways of oxen would be an enigma ; he might not even know that the ox was in its wrong place, and if he did he would be at a total loss to return it, and probably quite ignorant of who its owner might be. So man's dealing with his fellows is like his dealing with the ox. A man who has sworn to make the prophet's teaching his guide through life goes out, let us suppose, and meets a tramp. What is he to do ? He is unable to apply the principle of justice in its original meaning because the tramp is an enigma

to him. Being ignorant, however, of what justice really means, he fancies he will secure it by referring the tramp to the Charity Organisation Society. This he accordingly does, and goes away with an unsatisfactory feeling that his ideal has somehow crumbled before the blast of hard fact. In reality, if he had been true to the prophetic ideal he would perhaps have given the tramp sixpence simply on the ground of fellow-feeling, and because his wish for money would be the one part of the tramp's nature he would be at all able to comprehend. So again let us take the case of a successful business man. He has determined, we may imagine, to get on, and he has effected his purpose. Self-interest he acknowledges as the one ruling motive for life; and for those who accept his creed and are likewise determined to get on, he will have fellow-feeling. They may ruin him; but he will bear them no grudge. It is all part of the day's work, and the weakest must go to the wall. For men, however, who have no such ambitions, who want only to support their wife and family, and obtain a little quiet enjoyment in life, he will have no feeling whatever. He will grind them and crush them, for they will not seem to him to be good for anything else. They are of another world, and exist only to subserve his purpose. Man's inhumanity to man has been once and again decried by poet and prophet; but man's misunderstanding of man is the real root of much of the evil.

Justice and righteousness then, in the sense in which these words were used by the prophets, were ideas belonging to a primitive stage of society when all men were shepherds or all men were farmers, when each man understood his neighbour, and entered spontaneously

into his hopes and sorrows. It was not mere visionary idealism of a distant past which led the prophets' thoughts back with wistful longing to the days of David, and led them to project his reign forward into the coming age. They had been the last of the patriarchal period. David had been the last king who understood his people, and who was understood by them in return. Material prosperity and mutual fellow-feeling between the highest and the lowest Israelite were sufficient to cast a lasting glamour over this bygone age, akin to that with which many men look back upon their childhood when life was simple and everybody was good. The conflict between the real and the ideal exists because the ideas of justice and righteousness have not stood still, but have moved and developed with society. As class differences have broadened, and men have become less and less capable of understanding one another, it has been found necessary to regulate men's actions by a set of rules or a legal code, framed as near as may be (but this can never be anything other than very remote) to satisfy the primitive idea of justice. The administration of justice then comes to be the settlement of disputes in accordance with these rules ; and righteousness is the acting in such a way as to have these rules on one's own side, and against one's adversaries. This new justice may obviously be very different from the primitive kind ; indeed it would be true to say that it must be different inasmuch as it can take no cognisance whatever of the point of view of the contending parties, upon which the older idea was altogether based. Mercy, on the contrary, retains its ancient significance. It has never been codified ; but springs still as a life-giving fountain from the heart of man and

drops as the gentle rain from heaven. Our Lord was the first to discern the contradiction into which justice had fallen, and to advocate mercy alone. "Let all your dealings with your fellow-men be natural and spontaneous. Put yourself into his position and trust completely the generous instincts of the heart." Such was in effect His message. Since His voice was first heard, justice has been largely given up. Mercy and self-sacrifice have become the cry of the prophets. But it is the same cry as that of old, and suffers from the same disabilities. Self-sacrifice is mercy in its highest and noblest form, fellow-feeling so strongly developed that men will throw away all, even life itself, for the good of their fellows. History is illumined by such deeds; their influence never dies; their light shines with undimmed splendour down the ages. Since Christ's teaching was sealed by His death, Christianity has consistently taught that self-sacrifice is the highest law. Let men only turn away from ambition, from the acquirement of riches, and simply give up, and all will then be well. Evils of every sort will disappear, and the kingdom of heaven will be established. Alas! the fallacy of this scheme is often shown only too well in the lives of its most ardent champions. Let men trust to the utmost their noble impulses, let them not hesitate to throw away life itself when moved so to do, but let them not turn mercy and self-sacrifice into a principle. If life were simple, and all men understood one another, then each man might sacrifice himself for his neighbour, and his neighbour for him, and the community would be the gainer. But as things are, while men's minds remain to us dark recesses, in which glimmering points of light flicker here and there, self-sacrifice, to be of use



as a principle, must be codified. And when codified it becomes altruism ; and what a dreary, deadly thing is that.

The prophets, then, were dreamers. As social reformers, in our sense of the term, they may be considered useless, for they had no practical remedies to suggest. The fulfilment of their dreams demanded either a return to ancient conditions, which were once and for all passed away, or else a recasting of human nature to suit altered circumstances such as has not been effected yet. Our age too has its prophetic dreamers, although their outlook has somewhat changed. It is at last becoming generally recognised that self-interest is an integral, an ineradicable part of human nature, that men's desire to do something better than other men have done, to produce a great work, to make their names known, to obtain happiness is a basis upon which to build a scheme of things more permanent and stable than that of fellow-feeling alone, irregular and uncertain as the manifestations of the latter must be. And so the modern dreamer imagines a Socialist Utopia in which every man shall have a "fair and equal chance of expressing his individuality." But how this is to be brought about he does not really know, any more than did the prophets of ancient Israel. Most of his comrades however in this twentieth century have left dreams behind. "Away with vague ideals," they exclaim, "and let us come to practice. Let us work that we may help on Socialism, instead of dreaming of what it will be like." This sounds bold and helpful ; but it is in reality a counsel of despair. For what does it in fact mean ? It means that its advocates are to do their best, be it big or little, towards the attaining of a State system of collective



ownership, and to indulge meanwhile in the pious hope that as things can scarcely become worse than they are, they may, under the new arrangement, become somewhat better. Until men have learnt to understand one another, systems may rise and fall, but the old difficulties will remain. Are we then to conclude that the prophets, with their high idealism, and the reformers with their practical schemes, are both alike doomed to disappointment, baffled by that stubborn, tenacious resistance which human nature presents? The answer must be, No ! For the prophets had a hope which sustained them through all bitterness, and all disillusionment. They believed that one day God Himself would effect the desired change in the hearts of His people, such a change as would make the needed reforms not only possible, but inevitable. " I will put My law in their inward parts, and write it in their hearts ; and will be their God, and they shall be My people." A truer insight ; a deeper feeling ; a purer love of God ; a firmer grasp of truth ; this is what is needed, that the visions of the prophets may be realised to-day.

## CHAPTER V.

### AMOS AND HOSEA.

THE first prophet of the later era who has left for us a written record of his work and of his teaching is Amos. His native place was Tekoa, a village situated on the edge of the desert slopes which fall gradually from the central hills of Southern Palestine to the shores of the Dead Sea. In Tekoa, Amos followed the profession of a herdsman, and a tender of fig-trees. Guarding his sheep by day and by night on those wide, desolate slopes, Amos had ample opportunity for quiet contemplation. We can tell from his writings how great an impression that wide, barren prospect had made upon his mind, especially in the long hours of the night when the stars of Syria would shine out with a brilliance unsurpassed in any other quarter of the world. In the view of any wide expanse which stretches away in unbroken grandeur down to the distant horizon there is something particularly ennobling to the imagination. Where the earth stretches around in its primitive condition, unbroken by enclosure, untouched by the hand of man, there, as on the broad reaches of the ocean, the mind seems to expand, and, as it loses itself in the prospect, to approach nearer to the infinite. Details are forgotten : only the ultimate grandeur remains. All this, we may judge, had been vividly felt by Amos. The desert steppes, the starry expanse of heaven had, as we say, grown upon him ; and in so doing had impressed upon his mind a vision of the infinite glory of God's creation. In no other

prophet is so strong an expression of this feeling to be found as in this untutored son of the desert. "For lo, He that formeth the mountains, and createth the wind, and declareth unto man what is His thought, that maketh the morning darkness, and treadeth upon the high places of the earth, Yahweh, the God of Hosts is His name." "Seek Him that maketh the seven stars and Orion, and turneth the shadow of death into the morning, and maketh the day dark with night." But if the life of a shepherd was one which gave ample opportunities for quiet thought, it was also one which demanded a never-ceasing vigilance. The wilderness of Judea was in these days inhabited by voracious wild beasts, and it was part of the shepherd's duty to defend his flock from the attacks of such enemies. As David in earlier days had defended his flock against a lion and a bear, so must Amos have been accustomed to similar encounters. In his book he shows an intimate knowledge of the habits of lions, bears, and serpents, and it is from the dangers which these bring that he draws his most striking parallels. Thus Amos was a true child of Nature, spending his life encompassed by her winds, inured to her dangers, never far from her heart; yet he had also ample opportunities for communication with men. If on the one side of Tekoa stretched the illimitable desert, on the other began the cultivated land, whilst through the village itself ran the high road between the two important towns of Jerusalem and Hebron. Travelling merchants would be continually bringing along this road news of the wider world outside; whilst an occasional visit to Jerusalem would stimulate the prophet's interest. Thus he was enabled during his quiet hours to ponder over the fate of the nations. He had been told of the doings of the

people of Israel, and their nearest neighbours, of their rancours, their jealousies, and their wars ; further, he had heard of the ever-menacing power of Assyria. Pondering over these tidings, the conviction came to him that every one of the nations was doomed, that the punishment of Yahweh was awaiting them, and that this punishment would be meted out by death and captivity at the hands of the Assyrians. Fired with this conviction, he felt himself impelled to set out immediately in order to give his follow-countrymen timely warning. He repaired to Bethel, the chief religious centre of the Northern Kingdom, where the people were gaily worshipping the golden calves, perhaps in celebration of some victory of Jeroboam II.'s. Standing up amidst the throng of people, he declared to them in detail the sins of the neighbouring nations, and the punishment which would befall them. The kingdom of Judah is not spared, "for they have despised the law of Yahweh, and not kept His commandments." Then comes the turn of Israel. Oppression of the poor, licentiousness, drunkenness, are the charges brought against his hearers, therefore they will be destroyed as was the Amorite before them. Only the veriest remnant will be preserved by Yahweh ; as after a raid upon the flock a shepherd is sometimes able to rescue out of the lion's jaws two legs or a piece of an ear. He recounts the disasters which Yahweh has already sent upon them—famine, drought, and pestilence ; but from which they will take no warning. Their only hope is to turn back to God : there is a chance that if they do so He will forgive and restore them. "Hate the evil, and love the good, and establish judgement in the gate : it may be that Yahweh, God of Hosts, will be gracious unto the remnant of Joseph."

In the meanwhile the security in which they are trusting is altogether illusory. They are in the position of a man who, seeking escape from a lion, finds himself suddenly confronted with a bear; or of one who, repairing to his home for rest and security, is bitten by a lurking serpent. For Yahweh their God, upon whom they are relying, will be like a builder who has finished his work. His attentive care which He has lavished upon His people will cease: their sanctuaries will be overthrown, and the house of Jeroboam will perish by the sword. At this juncture the high priest Amaziah intervened. He had no doubt listened with ill-concealed impatience to the newcomer's warnings; and now the direct mention of the king's name gave him his opportunity. He sent to Jeroboam a charge of treason against the prophet. "Amos hath conspired against thee in the midst of the house of Israel: the land is not able to bear all his words." He further warned Amos himself to retire into his own country, and earn his living by practising his profession there. The suggestion that Amos was one of the professional prophetic guild is repudiated with scorn. In answer to the high priest, he declares that he was none such by profession. "I was no prophet, neither was I a prophet's son." His mandate comes directly from God. "Yahweh took me as I followed the flock, and Yahweh said unto me, 'Go, prophesy unto My people Israel.'" There follows a declaration of woe upon the unbelieving priest and upon the members of his family. They will fall by the sword, and he himself will die a captive in an unclean land. With such denunciations the book of Amos is brought to a close. The sure punishment will come upon the sinful nation; yet the destruction will not be final.

"I will not utterly destroy the house of Jacob, saith Yahweh."

If in the herdsman Amos we find something of the ruggedness of his native desert, we meet in his contemporary Hosea with a character of a very different mould. We are told nothing of Hosea's profession or mode of life. Not even his place of residence is revealed to us. We are simply informed that the word of Yahweh came to him in the days of Uzziah and other kings of Judah, and in those of Jeroboam, king of Israel. But little is recorded about the incidents of his life. He only recounts that he was commanded to marry and to love a faithless woman as a token of the love which Yahweh still felt towards His people, in spite of their idolatry and wickedness. Upon the children which were born to him were bestowed appropriate names in order to signify Yahweh's present attitude. "Lo-ruhamah" ("I will not have mercy"), was the name given to a daughter; "Lo-ammi" ("Not my people"), that of one of his sons. Turning then to the book which he has left us, we find a man of a tender, passionate, almost womanly nature, one to whom domestic contentment held out the greatest charm in life. And this trend of temperament colours, as we should expect it would, his view of the relations between Yahweh and His people. By him Yahweh is thought of as the father or as the husband of His people, disappointed bitterly through their infidelity, punishing them in sorrow rather than in anger, and ever hoping for a complete reconciliation in the future. Between Yahweh and His people should be the bond of a tender affection, such as had existed in the childhood of the nation, and such as again would be restored in the days to come. "When Israel was a



child, then I loved him, and called My son out of Egypt. I taught Ephraim also to walk, taking them by their arms. I drew them with bands of love." This deep affection has long since been clouded over by bitter indignation ; but Yahweh's love is always ready, if the people will only turn and accept it. " O Israel, return unto Yahweh thy God ; for thou hast fallen by thine iniquity. I will heal their backsliding, I will love them freely ; for Mine anger is turned away from him."

We are not told that the words of Amos or of Hosea produced any permanent effect. On the contrary, the succeeding history of the Northern Kingdom to the time of its downfall at the hands of the Assyrian points to the opposite conclusion. No more prophets appear to have attempted to preach in Bethel or in Samaria. In order to trace and to estimate the work of those who came after we must turn to the kingdom of Judah and to its capital, Jerusalem.

## CHAPTER VI.

### ISAIAH.

THE prophets, as has been remarked at an earlier stage, were men of religion, feeling themselves impelled through life by an outside force whose agents they were. They had not looked round at their fellow-countrymen, and pondered what message was most suitable for their age and circumstances; but they had a message stirring within them which they were compelled to give. The power which animated them they ascribed to the influence of God Himself. At all times of Hebrew history it was believed that superior gifts of strength or skill or wisdom were due to a special inbreathing, an inspiration, as we should say, from Yahweh. Gideon and Jephthah, Saul and David, were fitted for leadership by an inrush of the Spirit, Samson performed his deeds of strength when under its influence; the skilful worker, Bezaleel, chosen for the building of the tabernacle, was a man who was filled with the spirit of God. So when the prophets felt a ringing message in clear-cut, forcibly-expressed sentences to be shaping within their mind, they ascribed this to the work of God Himself. "Yahweh said unto me," such is continually the opening sentence of their messages; or as Ezekiel sometimes explains the same experience, "the spirit of Yahweh fell upon me," "the hand of Yahweh was strong upon me." Moreover, to every one of them there came a supreme moment in his life in which his destiny as a prophet was realised. Up to this moment

they had been, in all outward appearances, ordinary, respectable citizens, the processes working within unknown even to the prophet himself. But after this moment they were men with a mighty purpose not their own, men whom no obstacles could thwart, no terrors dismay. The manner of his own conversion is told us by Isaiah, perhaps the greatest of all the prophets, in that grand sixth chapter of his book. It was, we gather, whilst worshipping in the temple that there came to Isaiah a vision of Yahweh in His glory with His attendant spirits around Him. "I saw Yahweh sitting upon a throne, high and lifted up, and His train filled the temple." The prophet describes the seraphim who waited upon God, and the song with which they greeted one another, "Holy, holy, holy, is Yahweh of hosts : the whole earth is full of His glory." The swelling sound of the seraphs' chorus shook even the massive door-posts of the temple, and a great cloud of smoke arose, partly to conceal, partly to reveal, the presence of God, as it had done in the time of Moses. At sight of this wondrous vision Isaiah was filled with a deep sense of the unworthiness, not only of himself, but of the nation to which he belonged. "Then said I, Woe is me ! for I am undone ; because I am a man of unclean lips, and I dwell in the midst of a people of unclean lips : for mine eyes have seen the King, Yahweh of hosts." But the prophet is not to be hampered by the feelings of his own sinfulness or his own helplessness. With the confession of weakness, the source of it is removed. "Then flew one of the seraphims unto me, having a live coal in his hand, which he had taken with the tongs from off the altar : and he laid it upon my mouth, and said, ' Lo, this hath touched thy lips ; and thine iniquity is taken away, and

thy sin purged.'” At the same time is heard the call of Yahweh Himself for a worker. “Also I heard the voice of Yahweh, saying, ‘Whom shall I send, and who will go for Us?’” With the new accession of strength the prophet feels himself equal to the task, and acknowledges the call to be his. “Then said I, here am I; send me.” His offer is immediately accepted, and his orders are given to him, yet not without a warning that much of his preaching will fall upon deaf or hostile ears, that prejudice, misunderstanding, and blindness will combine to baffle his labours continually. “And He said, Go.” The word of command is followed by the word of warning, and that couched in terms which have become proverbial as expressive of the opposition with which new prophetic teaching may expect to be met. “Go, and tell this people, Hear ye indeed, but understand not; and see ye indeed, but perceive not. Make the heart of this people fat, and make their ears heavy, and shut their eyes; lest they see with their eyes, and hear with their ears, and understand with their hearts, and convert, and be healed.” With such a command and such a warning Isaiah started upon the work of his life. His experience is similar to that of many others, though given to him in a far heightened form. For there can be few who like Isaiah have felt the touch of the prophetic impulse, who have been consumed with some message for delivery to mankind, who have not also at the outset felt their way barred by a dark, impalpable barrier, the crass obstinacy and self-complacency of the mass of mankind, the heaviness of the ear, the fatness of the heart, the blindness of the eye, rendering it impossible for them to understand, much more to extend sympathy towards the prophetic

outpourings. Mankind goes on its way contented with its accepted ideas, unwilling to be disturbed, quite satisfied that all is for the best. To the prophets this attitude cannot but seem disheartening, soul-destructive, in deadly enmity towards all truth. And yet, looking at things from another standpoint, we may see that it is really all for the best. Were every man to accept, and devour greedily, the teaching of prophets, society would be overthrown, the advent of each new teacher would herald a revolution, humanity would advance by cataclysms much as those of which the old geologists dreamed.

Your creeds are dead, your rites are dead,

Your social order too.

Where tarries he the power who said

"I will make all things new"?

Such is in effect the message of every prophet. It is his to pull down convention, to expose sham, to point out to society that its whole life is based upon a lie, that the times are out of joint, that men say one thing and do the opposite. But what is the use, we may well ask, of the prophets giving their message at all, if it is better that they should be passed by, and misunderstood, if it is better that conventions should still stand, shams still survive? The answer is not far to seek. Convention, conservatism, common-sense, the feeling uppermost in the mind of man that the old is good, these are the nerves and sinews which bind society together. From the prophets springs forth the principle of life, that principle without which the nerves and sinews would wither to dissolution. Every prophet is in a sense the great heart of the community in which he lives, whence is pumped the life-blood with its

vivifying flow of new thoughts and new ideas. But as the life-blood of the organism must be conducted through many channels in order to vivify every portion of the system, so must glowing ideas be conducted by many and various agencies until they have refreshed every individual soul, and become part of the common stock of mankind. Or again, the teaching of the prophets may be compared to a reverberating thunder-clap. As before its clash men flee indoors and secure themselves from the drenching downpour of the thunder shower, so when the storm is over, when the sun shines through the still watery atmosphere from behind the retreating clouds, when the raindrops glisten upon every leaf, and the vast downpour is conducted through a thousand sparkling streams and over many a mountain fall to renew the face of the earth, men issue forth with a new delight and feel that at last the dry dustiness of a rainless summer is over, that parched Nature is rejoicing because the time of refreshing has come. Man could not live without his prophets, unconscious though he may be of their very existence, as unconscious as he often is of the beating of his own heart or the action of his nerves. And yet in some dim, mysterious way mankind does seem to be conscious that in the works of the prophets is his very life-breath contained. It would almost be safe to say that no great prophetic work has ever been penned which has not been handed down to the after-ages. For reasons, often the most absurd and trivial, with meanings placed upon them the very reverse of those which they really contain, the works of the prophets have always survived. For those who have ears to hear, eyes to see, they live, they are a force for ever, their grandeur shall no lapse of age diminish.



But to return to our immediate subject. It may be asked why if Isaiah knew that his message was from the first doomed to misunderstanding and rejection, he took the trouble to deliver it? To answer such a question after a perusal of the words of his call seems almost unnecessary. Isaiah gave his message because he could not help it, because he was impelled by the imperious necessity of Yahweh's call, because he knew that his every word and action was subserving some purpose greater than his mere reason could compass. Questions like this spring from the modern rationalistic manner of regarding Isaiah and his fellows. In former times a prophet of the Old Testament was regarded as something remote from, alien to, the ordinary run of mankind, a mouth-piece of divinity, an instrument through which the words of God were projected upon this lower earth, in himself a mere nothing, almost bereft of all individuality or personality. Within the last fifty years the swing of the pendulum has taken to the other extreme. The tendency now is to make the prophet very much like an ordinary Englishman, subject indeed now and again to visions, and with a very assertive way of emphasising his conclusions. It is assumed that when a prophet heralded his statements with the words, "Thus saith Yahweh," he meant much the same as would a modern savant in employing the phrase, "I am absolutely certain." The old idea was perhaps nearer the truth, although the new contains more hope. It can need but a slight perusal of their works to show that the prophets were quite unlike a modern reasoning Englishman. They were in fact in all that they said and did the creatures of impulse, and of impulse alone. Their great conclusions came to them

as sudden intuitions ; of the process of thought which had led up to such a conclusion they were totally unconscious. It seemed to them to come as a direct message from without ; a message, that is, from Yahweh the ruler of their being and of the whole earth. So in any difficulty or crisis they did not sit down as a modern man might do to think out a solution, they simply waited until one came. And as their solution came by intuition and impulse, so much the more reliable was it. A chain of reasoning can give at best but a moderate probability that the solution arrived at is the correct one, an intuition may give absolute certainty, and it did so in every case to the prophets. They, as far as we can see, never faltered ; they never committed a blunder or were compelled to retract their steps. They trusted absolutely to Yahweh, and Yahweh carried them through. Nor is their example really peculiar. It would be almost safe to say that all the great deeds of history have been done upon impulse. Men have known instinctively that one course and one course only could save them, and this course they have pursued through every obstacle. But the courses of action prescribed by reason waver before the eyes, some new unconsidered factor may at any moment appear to destroy them, they may even fall through inherent unreliability. With such thoughts as these is the man harassed who trusts solely to the efforts of his reason ; so poor and puny a thing is our conscious reasoning self, so beset by doubts, difficulties, distractions. But our unconscious self is strong, determined masterful ; let us trust only to it and no emergency can affright us, no alarm scare.

The deepest and most important of the prophets' intuitions seem to have taken the shape of visions, as

that of Isaiah described above. It would be a mistake to suppose that these visions were mystical states of mind, giving glimpses into the inner meaning of the universe, such as were experienced by Oriental seers of other races. On the contrary, in strict accordance with the genius of the Hebrew character, they were essentially practical, being moments in which the intuitive impulse to action was given in a greatly heightened and far more impressive form than usual. Beyond this statement we cannot safely go ; we are confronted with an experience which lies beyond the powers of our imagination. To many great men, men of all walks of life, scientists, soldiers, statesmen, has come a moment, ever after vividly remembered, when their life has been devoted to some great object from which they have never swerved. Such, only far more impressive, far more soul-enthraling, were the calls of the Hebrew prophets. "Here am I, send me." In that all-glorious moment, Isaiah knew that there was a work to be done for which he and he alone was fitted, and that an imperious force impelled him to this work. And what was this work ? It might almost be summed up in four words, "The exposure of shams." Isaiah had to go forth and tell the people that their worship of Yahweh was no worship of Him at all, but that of the Baalim under another name ; that whilst pretending to serve Yahweh they were neglecting His first commands given of old to the nation, the demands for justice, mercy and truth ; that the strength upon which they prided themselves was in reality but despicable weakness ; that the political course which ordinary prudence seemed to point out was leading the nation to an inevitable doom. We have already dealt shortly with the social aspect of the prophetic teaching, and we

have likewise seen how the pure worship of Yahweh was not one such as ordinary human nature could sustain, but was bound to be lost in the more popular and more fervid local worships. We have seen that the prophets, and Isaiah amongst them, could declaim against these evils, but could produce no adequate remedies because they did not understand the real nature of the problem, a fact which Isaiah himself was the first to recognise.

It remains to consider Isaiah in his pre-eminent rôle of leader and diplomatist. For he not only thundered as occasion offered against the many evils of society, but he also undertook to steer his country safely through all the dangers which beset it, and he established himself as a pillar of strength for king and people. Absolutely self-reliant and trusting, as we have seen, to the uttermost his own intuitions, he might have become, if his advice had been followed, the real maker of the kingdom of Judah. Falling foul as he did of the commonsense, opportunist policy in vogue, he, after a long uphill fight, finally vindicated gloriously his opinions. Nor in his policy was there any fluctuation or shadow of turning; from the beginning to the end of his career his mind was unchanged. His advice to the State remained always the same: to taboo foreign intrigue and alliance; to acknowledge freely their own utter helplessness and to trust Yahweh alone, "For thus saith Yahweh, God, the Holy One of Israel, 'In returning and rest shall ye be saved; in quietness and in confidence shall be your strength'; and ye would not." Of course they would not; the advice seemed unreasonable and absurd. For let us consider for a moment how it must have appeared, bereft of its originator's enthusiasm and held up to the cold light of reason. The kingdom

of Judah was situated in the very midst of the civilised world, almost precisely half-way between the two great powers of the day. International politics were in a confused and turbulent state, far exceeding any such that we could imagine of modern Europe before the outbreak of 1914. Add to this the fact that Judah during the reign of Uzziah had lately acquired a considerable expansion of power, placing her first in importance after Israel amongst all the petty nations round, and tempting her to consider herself as almost potentially equal to one of the greater powers, and it may readily be seen that a policy advocating quiet and self-repression was scarcely likely to prove attractive. It smacked, to say the least, of lack of patriotism ; and besides, to the ordinary intelligence, it seemed to spell unavoidable destruction. If Judah were to remain quiet, so must have run the arguments of its opponents, she would inevitably be engulfed in the storm of the nations. Her one chance of safety must lie in taking her fate within her own hands, in playing off one against another the forces which were compassing her destruction, and in attempting by dexterous management to steer the ship of state safely out of the storms and dangers which beset her. Yet it needed only a slight extension of this foresighted prudence to show that Isaiah was perfectly right. In reality the one thing necessary for Judah was to keep herself unnoticed. It has already been mentioned that, although situated geographically in the very centre of the civilised world, she yet lay in a back-water, or, rather, in one of those quiet river pools where leaves and twigs idly flow, whilst all around them swirls the bubbling torrent. Almost inaccessible from all sides except one, no high roads, no caravan routes ran through

her territory. Jerusalem, originally occupied because of the strength of her position, afterwards becoming the administrative capital of a considerable kingdom, was no mercantile centre, and attracted no traffic beyond that required to supply the needs of her own population. There was next to nothing which could tempt a foreign power to conquer her, provided she did not show herself at all a dangerous adversary\* to that power. If she did so her doom was sealed. For Judah's relative importance over the surrounding nations was an extremely illusory thing. In face of the armies of Assyria her military forces were insignificant and her defences but as straw; and, whichever of the great powers was to be successful in the struggle, that power was bound at the conclusion to crush all smaller rivals. Again, even if Judah should not have succeeded in passing altogether unnoticed, yet so long as she had remained quiet there would have been but little to fear. The Assyrian monarchs, ruthless as they seem, did not waste their energy in prosecuting campaigns against peacefully inclined nations who were willing to acknowledge their sovereignty and to pay due tribute. Judah might have paid this tribute, as in the end she always had to do, and still have remained in every essential an independent, autonomous kingdom. And yet, although when viewed from distant heights, reason bears out the policy which Isaiah's enthusiasm dictated, how unnatural would it have seemed, how alien to human nature, if that policy had been followed. For human nature must pursue its bent, even though that bent lead down the path to destruction.

Isaiah's first emergence upon the political platform occurred during the reign of the weak-minded Ahaz. A



combination against Judah had been effected by the Kings of Damascus and of Samaria, Rezin and Pekah. The object of the move was probably to force Judah into a more active and hostile attitude towards Assyria, which power was then threatening the two confederate kingdoms with approaching extinction. Damascus, brought as it had been into constant conflict with Assyria, had lost much of its ancient prestige; but Israel had proportionately gained, and still in the days of Pekah retained some of the glory acquired by Jeroboam II. Ahaz and the Judaïtes felt their strength vanish, and realised their own incompetency to face the united forces. "And it was told the house of David, saying, Syria is confederate with Ephraim. And his heart was moved, and the heart of his people, as the trees of the forest are moved with the wind." In this emergency, Ahaz, as we learn from the book of Kings, turned towards Assyria, a step he must have been cogitating when accosted by Isaiah in the highway of the fuller's field. Isaiah's message is that which he continued to give in every similar emergency. "Take heed, and be quiet; fear not, neither let thine heart be faint because of these two tails of smoking firebrands, for the fierce anger of Rezin and Syria and of the son of Remaliah." Ahaz must wait; Syria and Samaria are inevitably doomed; no appeal to Assyria will hasten or delay for one instant the execution of her purposes, whilst it will only drag Judah into undesired notice, and finally attract all the armies of Assyria towards her devoted soil. Ahaz rejected Isaiah's advice; he appealed to Assyria, and in return for her help Judah became her slavish vassal. In the year 732 Damascus met her doom-at the hands of Tiglath-Pileser, and ten

years later his successor Shalmaneser IV. commenced the last siege of Samaria. The enterprise was completed by Sargon, and the last remnant of the ten tribes of Israel scattered over the earth. This was effected in accordance with the policy of the later Assyrian monarchs, who, wearied of continually coercing recalcitrant subjects, once for all brought their rebellions to an end by transplanting them in small batches to distant regions, and filling the land with colonists of a more peaceful nature. This was a fate which Amos and Hosea had foretold for the Northern kingdom, and had seen to be inevitable, although they kept a firm hold of a future glorious time when the remnant of Israel would be restored, and the days of David would come again. Isaiah now saw that the same fate was approaching Judah, though he too could confidently affirm that such would not be the end of the nation's hope. On the contrary, the nation will rise purified by its troubles, henceforth to follow its God, and to be the glory of the whole earth. "In that day shall the shoot of Yahweh be beautiful and glorious, and the fruit of the earth shall be majestic and comely for them that are escaped of Israel. And it shall come to pass that he that is left in Zion, and he that remaineth in Jerusalem, shall be called holy, even everyone that is written among the living in Jerusalem: when Yahweh shall have washed away the filth of the daughters of Zion, and shall have purged the blood of Jerusalem from the midst thereof by the blast of judgement, and by the blast of burning." Ahaz had launched the state of Judah upon the downward path: his successor made valiant attempts to retrieve its fortunes.

The date of Hezekiah's accession to the throne is

difficult to ascertain. We do not know for certain whether it took place before or after Samaria had succumbed to the arms of Sargon ; at any rate, it was not until after that event that Hezekiah and his doings became prominent in the political world. One of the most earnest, well-meaning and pious of Judah's kings, he accorded to Isaiah the full reverence which was his due ; yet his intellect was too much of the ordinary stamp to enable him to appreciate the prophet's political views, and in his efforts to extricate himself and his kingdom he only became more and more engulfed within the turbulent ocean. After the blotting out of the Northern kingdom, Judah succeeded to her predominating position, and became inevitably the focus of all agitation directed against the rule of Assyria. Hezekiah accepted, doubtless not without pride, his influential position, and proceeded with considerable energy to cement an offensive and defensive alliance between all the malcontents. Being aware, however, that their own strength even when united could avail them but little, the allies were forced to look elsewhere for help, and this they found, or thought they found, in Egypt. Jealous as she always was of the military prowess of her rival, this power welcomed and encouraged their advances, as likely to prove a hindrance to the expansion of Assyria, whilst in almost every emergency she showed herself either unable or unwilling to supply any effective aid. Yet, owing to the prestige of her name, the hollowness of her pretensions was never recognised, and Judah and the Philistines continued to the very last to trust in the help of this shifty power. Amongst those who ruled the fortunes of Judah the Egyptian alliance became the accepted political creed

of the day, a creed from which only one voice was heard to demur, that of Isaiah. He with heart and soul opposed this alliance, together with all the restlessness and disturbance to which it gave rise. Let Judah, having once succumbed to Assyria, remain contented with her position, humble though it might seem. Along that road only lay the path of safety ; none was to be found in Egypt. " The Egyptians are men, and not God ; and their horses flesh, and not spirit." Sargon nipped the insurrection in the bud, sending down his Tartan or commander-in-chief, who reduced Philistia to peace, sacking Ashdod, and by this example probably reducing Hezekiah for the time being to a state of peaceful submission. Isaiah's comment upon this occurrence, when Egypt as usual failed to provide help, is to be found in the twentieth chapter of the book called by his name. Disaffection however still slumbered, and on the death of Sargon in 705 broke out afresh. From that moment events began to move rapidly.

Sargon's successor was a greater and a more formidable character even than Sargon himself, Sennacherib, whose name has become almost a household word for ruthless might and pitiless severity. It was, however, three years before Sennacherib found himself at liberty to set in order his Western lands, and during this time the star of Hezekiah seemed to be altogether in the ascendant. During this period must in all probability be placed the embassy from Merodach-Baladan, the struggling Chaldean chieftain of the Southern marshes, who was endeavouring, against overwhelming odds, to establish himself as independent sovereign of Babylon. Hezekiah, with what seems pardonable pride, showed the ambassadors the extent of his treasured wealth, and accepted

the proffered alliance, only to be severely reproved by Isaiah, who foresaw danger in the future, even from this apparently now so helpless people. Sennacherib, having crushed the Chaldean, and put in order the other troubles which demanded his attention near at home, directed his march upon the Western confederates. From that moment Judah's doom seemed very nigh. The avenger was drawing near, and nothing could stay his onset. Isaiah at first accepted the fate which in spite of his entreaties the nation had drawn upon itself. Through the Assyrian he saw the working out of Yahweh's purposes for the punishment of a disobedient nation. And yet this was not all. For as the danger drew hourly more close, as the real character of Yahweh's avenger became ever more apparent, a strong revulsion of feeling shook the prophet's soul. Could it be possible that this king and his people, without mercy and without pity, relentlessly cruel, boasting of their own might alone, were really meant for the crushing of Yahweh's own nation? Israel to Yahweh was still dear, in spite of all her backsliding, as she was to His prophet; for all her falling away she was still in every respect superior to this insensate instrument of punishment, this embodiment of brute strength. And so with this revulsion of feeling there came to Isaiah his last and grandest intuition, the final culmination of his genius, if genius it can rightly be called, and if indeed there was not something here more wonderful, more unsearchable than even genius itself. The Assyrian would be turned back, the holy city of Zion would never fall before his arms, for Yahweh would assuredly defend His people. His presence will have a salutary effect upon Judah, and then his destruction will be certain. "Ho, Assyrian!



the rod of Mine anger, the staff of Mine indignation ; Shall the axe boast itself against him that heweth therewith ? Shall the saw magnify itself against him that shaketh it ? Because of thy raging against Me, and for that thine arrogancy is come up into Mine ears, therefore will I put My hook in thy nose, and My bridle in thy lips, and I will turn thee back by the way by which thou camest." So grand a flash of faith had but once to illuminate his mind for the prophet to cling to it through all exigencies. Never once did his belief falter, never once did he show the slightest weakness or begin to confess himself mistaken. There is something here which baffles our ordinary powers of comprehension. It is possible to explain most prophetic intuitions as the result of unconscious reasoning, a sort of subterranean process which goes on within the mind of every man, and the results of which are often more clear and more certain than those evoked by our conscious thought ; but it is difficult to see how any chain, conscious or unconscious, of reasoning, as we understand the word, could have brought a man to Isaiah's position. In the outside world not one slightest piece of evidence could be obtained to give colour to the hope that the Assyrian would not deal with Jerusalem for her repeated acts of insubordination in exactly the same manner as he had dealt with Damascus, Samaria, or Babylon before her, namely, raze her to the ground, and scatter her inhabitants to the winds of heaven, or that anything would occur to prevent him carrying out his task. No, faith, and faith alone is our explanation. We here have a man who looked out upon the world as ruled by a Master who demanded obedience and righteousness from all His instruments, and who knew too that



he himself was in all things His Master's chosen servant. His was no philosophical theory of the universe ; it was felt and it was certain ; and so upon it could be staked all ; and even where the road seemed utterly lost amidst brambles and thickets, its light could illuminate a path discerned by no other eye of mortal man.

This faith was soon to be put to the severest of tests. The reconstruction of the exact course of events which occurred in this memorable year 702 B.C. is beset by difficulties. Many scholars have almost given up in despair the attempt to harmonise Sennacherib's official record with the narrative given in II. Kings xviii., xix. The difficulty is best surmounted by taking the two accounts to be not synchronous but consecutive, the Biblical history following upon that which Sennacherib preferred to record. This is the solution put forward by Dr. Pinches, a solution which besides having many points of detail in its favour possesses the advantage of simplicity as well. Turning then first to Sennacherib's own annals we read that he directed his march through the Phœnician coastland, subduing as he went Sidon and the Syrian cities, and spreading the terror of his name through the neighbouring peoples. Continuing his route southwards, the Philistine cities were next encountered. Askelon was severely dealt with, and its rebel king Zedekia, " his ancestral gods, his wife, his sons, his daughters, his brothers, his kindred," were all deported to Assyria. At Ekron the situation was somewhat different. The king of that town, by name Padi, had remained loyal to his suzerain, but had been dethroned by his people and sent in chains to Jerusalem to be kept in the custody of Hezekiah. The doom of the rebels was postponed for a time by the advent of an

Egyptian army. This was completely defeated by Sennacherib, who then meted out drastic punishment to the lords and nobles of Ekron. Now was the time for the touch of completion to be added to the campaign, in the subjugation of the arch-rebel Hezekiah. That his subjection was the culmination, without which other deeds of prowess would have been but fragmentary and incomplete, is shown by Sennacherib in his assigning to the conquest of Judah a length equal to almost half of the whole inscription. "And Hezekiah the Judaite, who had not submitted to my yoke—forty-six of his fenced cities and fortresses and small towns in their vicinity without number I besieged and took. Two thousand and one hundred and fifty persons, small and great, male and female, horses, mules, asses, camels, large cattle, small cattle without number, I brought forth from the midst of them and allotted as spoil. As for himself, like a caged bird in Jerusalem, his capital city, I shut him up. Forts against him I constructed, and any who would go out of the city gate I caused to turn back." Then follows an account of the curtailment of Hezekiah's territory, and of the vast tribute sent by him to Nineveh. The Biblical account begins by describing as tersely as may be this campaign of Sennacherib's in Judah. "Now it came to pass in the fourteenth year of King Hezekiah that Sennacherib, king of Assyria, came up against all the fenced cities of Judah and took them." Here we have a starting point in which both the Assyrian and Hebrew records are in complete harmony; and reading backwards in the one case, forwards in the other, from this common focus, we may see in the mind's eye the whole drama enacted before us. The Jewish historian indeed does

not mention the siege of Jerusalem ; it doubtless detracts a little from the dramatic *dénouement*, at which he was so eager to arrive. The siege, at any rate, as is clear from the Assyrian inscription, was of short duration, and resulted in no serious damage to Jerusalem. Fresh disturbances in the land of Philistia doubtless rendered Sennacherib extremely anxious to set that territory in complete order, if only to secure the safety of his return march, and so caused him to be readily placated by Hezekiah's offer of tribute. He withdrew his forces ; and Jerusalem, beyond the loss of a certain amount of treasure, retained her old strength unimpaired. The siege of Lachish, upon which Sennacherib now bent his energies, is not mentioned in our extant inscription, an indubitable proof that it could not have occurred until after the campaign in Judah. The importance of this siege is shown by the existence of a bas-relief depicting the prisoners of Lachish passing in solemn procession before the throne of Sennacherib, and the fact that it is mentioned in none of the official records can scarcely be accounted for otherwise than by supposing that those for the period now under consideration have been unfortunately lost, if they were ever written. Hezekiah could not but congratulate himself upon his luck in having escaped thus easily ; indeed, nothing but a most serious danger could have induced Sennacherib to act thus weakly towards Jerusalem, when he once had her within his grip. Of this the Assyrian was himself very conscious, and no sooner was the immediate danger which threatened the safety of his communications passed away when he repented of his clemency, and detached his Tartan at the head of a body of troops to demand the unconditional surrender of

Jerusalem. This official does not seem to have ever intended to proceed to active measures. Sennacherib thought that after the one taste of his strength which she had experienced, a threat, accompanied by a show of armed force, would be sufficient to bring Jerusalem to her knees. In this calculation he would not have been far out, had it not been for the presence within that city of one man. With the honeyed words of advice and warning addressed by the Rabshakeh to the inhabitants of Jerusalem, the manner in which he plays now upon one emotion, now upon another, we are all familiar. With the mighty names of the king of Assyria he shakes like aspen leaves the watchers on the walls, "Let not Hezekiah deceive you : for he shall not be able to deliver you "; and then before the threat has lost its force comes a subtle suggestion of peaceful contentment under the Assyrian sway, far from the terrors and tumults of the present moment. "Thus saith the king of Assyria, 'Make your peace with me, and come out to me : and eat ye every one of his vine, and every one of his fig-tree, and drink ye every one the waters of his own cistern ; until I come and take you away to a land like your own land, a land of corn and wine, a land of bread and vineyards.' " But the threat is after all mightier than the promise, and upon that note he concludes : "Beware lest Hezekiah persuade you, saying, 'Yahweh will deliver us.' Hath any of the gods of the nations delivered his land out of the hand of the king of Assyria ? " And the people answered him not a word ; that stubborn loyalty, one of the most precious of Israel's possessions, served them in this, as in every other emergency. The eyes of the State are turned upon Isaiah ; he is its one sure pillar, and if he fails all is indeed lost. Isaiah's reply is curt,

but stately. The prophet has indeed passed through the real crisis. That was when the entrenchments of Sennacherib were actually encompassing the royal city, and the battering rams in position for the demolishing of its walls. From the moment that the siege had been suspended the clouds had begun to roll away; and Isaiah could now begin by the eye of sense to find his way along the path where that of faith had alone guided him before. To a man of insight, with power to probe beneath the surface, it must have been apparent that this last move was the merest bluff, and the Rabshakeh's appeal must have revealed rather than hidden the fact that his master was becoming entangled in serious difficulties. And so, seeing the result on which he has ever pinned his faith being now worked out to its completion, his advice is given, clear and unfaltering, "Thus saith Yahweh, 'Be not afraid of the words that thou hast heard, wherewith the servants of the king of Assyria have blasphemed Me. Behold, I will put a spirit in him, and he shall hear a rumour, and shall return to his own land; and I will cause him to fall by the sword in his own land.'"

The Tartan and the Rabshakeh, having carried out their orders to the letter, could do no more, and returned to headquarters. These were now situated at Libnah, whence the Assyrians had removed after the subjugation of Lachish. In the drama being played out before us Sennacherib and his armies form as it were a dark background, a portion of the stage where there move vague shapes and shadowy masses, but where nothing definite can be discerned. We are apt to regard Sennacherib's career whilst these events were taking place as one of unlimited success. If the truth were ever to be discovered the reverse



would probably be seen to be the case, and we should learn that Sennacherib (like Napoleon before Moscow), in spite of particular successes, was getting himself more and more involved in a position of extreme gravity. In such a position it could not have been encouraging to learn that his attempt at bluff had completely failed, and that Jerusalem remained as strong and formidable as ever. Moreover, Tir-hakah, the energetic Ethiopian monarch, attracted doubtless by the quandary into which he saw his adversary falling, was once again upon the move, and adding considerably to the difficulties of the situation. Confronted by this new danger, Jerusalem was yet too important to be left unsubdued, and one more attempt was made to compass the downfall of Hezekiah. The real gravity of Sennacherib's plight is shown by the fact that he could now spare from his forces not a single troop, and was compelled to rely upon a letter alone, hoping that his mere fiat might carry conviction to the Hebrew. And this hope fell not so far short of realisation. That Hezekiah on reading the letter should have fallen into such a state of dismay and panic must at first seem surprising when it is remembered that an exactly similar threat, backed up moreover by armed force, had been productive of no results whatever; but Hezekiah was a weak man, a man indeed actuated by the best intentions and sustained by the enthusiasm of the moment, but lacking that stability of purpose which must be the mark of all really noble characters. On this occasion, as on others, he showed himself totally unable to profit by the experience of the past, unable, it might be said, to put two and two together, fluttering like a moth which has been several times burnt once more into the candle flame. Isaiah



again proved the saviour of his city. He saw that this was the last challenge, and in correspondingly confident hope he replied to it. "Therefore thus saith Yahweh concerning the king of Assyria, He shall not come unto this city, nor shoot an arrow there, neither shall he come before it with shield, nor cast a mount against it. By the way that he came, by the same shall he return, and he shall not come into this city, saith Yahweh. For I will defend this city to save it for Mine own sake, and for My servant David's sake." The final act of the drama remains shrouded in darkness, and of Sennacherib's fate we can only guess. Was he overpowered by his numerous enemies, or did a plague bred in the swampy marshes of the Egyptian frontier decimate his troops, or did a rumour of impending evil recall him to his own country? At any rate he returned to Nineveh, and came no more into the Western coast-lands.

Isaiah is the greatest and grandest of the Hebrew prophets. The mind's eye pictures him a giant in the midst of a world of pigmies, stern, steadfast, immovable as the mountains which he so greatly loved, one of the strong men of the earth. And not strong because he was practical! No, his strength came to him because his life was founded upon impossible ideals, because he lived ever in a golden future, because he never allowed the murky present to contaminate him with its touch. Nor was he strong with the cynical strength of self-possession! On the contrary, his was a soul through which throbbed every heart-wave of human passion; a soul for which, next to truth and righteousness, drama and poetry were the mainspring of life. In his writings there is felt and mirrored every phase of the complex life of that city and people, whose soul was to him nearer

and dearer than his own. And all without one trace of self-consciousness, that agent so destructive to modern literature! Let not the jaded critic or philosopher turn to Isaiah. The torrent rush of healthy feeling will but perplex and terrify. Nor will the city dweller find much of comfort. For in Jerusalem, unlike our modern cities, the Israelite still lived close to the throbbing heart of Nature, he still retained some memories of the days of wandering when, as man pitched his tent in the evening to watch the sun sinking behind the hills, the long brown grass stretching over the plains, the trees of the forest shaken by the wind, with the breeze blowing around him, the spreading heavens above, he would feel in the depths of his soul the wideness and mystery of the universe, the intense reality of his little community and of its Divine Protector. And Isaiah, although a statesman, a frequenter of palaces, is yet one of the wanderers and sojourners upon earth, one upon whose mind Nature has imprinted the only lasting pictures. The mountains and the forests impress themselves upon his every ideal, their breath pervades his every hope. His writings bring before us in all their freshness and all their grandeur the hills, the craggy ravines, the lonely deserts of Palestine, with far away the snow-clad heights of Lebanon, her sides clothed in the spreading cedars, whose majestic strength seems paralleled in the character of the prophet who loved them.

## CHAPTER VII.

### JEREMIAH.

BETWEEN the triumph of Isaiah and the appearance of his successor more than 70 years elapsed, years marked as far as may be judged by a complete reaction against the ideals of that great statesman. With the removal of his strong hand, and the death of his pupil Hezekiah, all the pent-in energy of a degenerate people burst forth in strongest effervescence. Forgetful alike of the past and of the future, the whole nation, princes, priests, prophets and people, abandoned themselves to the orgies and excesses of their worship; a worship which, whatever it might once have been to simple, yet imaginative rustics, was to them no worship, but simply a letting loose of the passions; such a letting loose as tended to efface all self-respect and self-control; to remove all the traits which turn mere human beings into real men. The utter carelessness and laxity of the time was no doubt largely due to the political situation. The embroilments and imminent dangers of the reign of Hezekiah must have had a bracing effect upon men's minds, prompting them to take life as serious and action as real. During the greater part of the reign of Manasseh, the king under whom the reaction reached its highest pitch, we hear of no outside disturbances; the Chronicler alone tells us that the king of Assyria sent forces against Judah, and carried Manasseh away to Babylon, an event followed by that monarch's repentance and the partial restoration of the worship of Yahweh. Nor

is there any reason to doubt the accuracy of this narrative. It may well have happened that an illusive rest, following upon Sennacherib's withdrawal, was rudely broken by another attack from Assyria, and that from that moment a partial recovery set in. Be that as it may, we find ascending the throne in the year 639 a man of noble ideals and of high character, Josiah, the last great scion of the house of David. Much he seems to have inherited from his great-grandfather Hezekiah, but with the latter's main characteristics were combined a clearer outlook and a more stable purpose. He fully grasped in all its spirit the advice of Isaiah, advice which must have been greatly perverted during the reign of Manasseh—that only in quietness and in seclusion lay security. During his whole reign, right up to its unfortunate conclusion, he avoided political complications. If, as is probable, he found himself in the position of a vassal to Assyria, he remained so until the end ; indeed, it was but excessive loyalty to his overlord which caused him at last to overstep the limits set by his own policy, and which brought about his downfall. One striking occurrence marks Josiah's otherwise uneventful reign. In the year 621, whilst the Temple was undergoing repairs, the book of Deuteronomy was discovered. That soul-inspiring work appealed to all the young king's noblest instincts, and a drastic reformation was set in progress. Every one of the rural shrines, all of which had been devoted to the forms of Canaanitish worship, were razed to the ground, and all tokens and emblems of the same worship which had intruded themselves into the Temple of Jerusalem were likewise demolished. The reformation was all the more easily accomplished by reason that the extent of Jerusalem's sovereignty

had probably since the invasion of Sennacherib been considerably curtailed, and her importance also greatly enhanced in proportion to that of the surrounding district ; for there is no evidence to show that the large cities of the Judean kingdom had in any degree recovered from the blows that ruthless invader had dealt at them. The effects of the reformation cannot have been considerable ; the old worships were probably still carried on, even under illicit conditions. Even if this was not so it was character that was pre-eminently needed for the salvation of Judah, and towards the formation of character Josiah's reforms cannot largely have contributed. Let us turn our attention to a really far more important, if less obtrusive event, which also marks this reign.

In the thirteenth year of king Josiah, 626 B.C., there came to a young man the imperious call. " Before I formed thee in the belly I knew thee ; and before thou camest forth out of the womb I sanctified thee ; I have appointed thee a prophet unto the nations." As the thought of his own insignificance and incapability had before overwhelmed the soul of Isaiah, so does it in this same supreme moment that of Jeremiah. " Ah, Lord God ! behold I cannot speak ; for I am a child." But at the very moment there came upon him, as there had come upon Isaiah, as there must come upon every prophet, the final assurance. " Yahweh said unto me, ' Say not, I am a child : for to whomsoever I shall send thee thou shalt go, and whatsoever I shall command thee thou shalt speak. Be not afraid because of them : for I am with thee to deliver thee,' saith the Lord. Then Yahweh put forth His hand and touched my mouth. And Yahweh said unto me, ' Behold, I have put My

words in thy mouth. See, I have this day set thee over the nations and over the kingdoms, to pluck up, and to break down, and to destroy, and to overthrow, to build, and to plant.' ” Here is the old story again repeated, an intense realisation of personal incompetence and unworthiness, coupled with an absolute self-confidence, the confidence coming from an outside power which drives, a power which is yet not outside but within, which pulsates in every heart-beat, which throbs in every thought. Such was Jeremiah's call. It lacks the grand dramatic setting into which Isaiah by his very nature threw all his thoughts ; it also lacks something of the latter's imperious force and clearness of vision. And in proportion to the completeness of these two last-mentioned factors do we find to be the adequacy of the call. Into Isaiah's inner consciousness we are granted one grand, dazzling glimpse—and then, a character formed. Henceforth he moves before us, clear, serene, and steadfast, not one superfluous word uttered, not one thought which does not burn in the intensity of its meaning. But Jeremiah was destined, even after his supreme moment, to undergo disillusion and development ; the one, as through opposition and treachery he came to understand the blank, unreceptive, unyielding nature of ordinary humanity ; the other, as he gained a grip upon facts, a wide outlook upon human life, a clearer habit of thought, and an understanding of the processes of history. His earlier warnings lack grip ; they are vague, general, many times repeated. We hear again the old cry for justice and mercy, denunciations against idolatry, vague threatenings of a foe from the North. Only once in these early years does Jeremiah rise to a real height of power. The scene is



Yahweh's Temple, that Temple whose glories had impressed themselves upon Isaiah's deepest thoughts. To him the presence of Yahweh had ever been most intimately connected with His Temple; it was that especially which made Zion invulnerable, that which Yahweh could never desert. Yet this thought once so living, so burning, had become, as all thoughts inevitably must, a formula; a formula, a form of words, inanely repeated by the crowd in the hope that therein might be safety. Here was a sham, albeit based upon a once great reality, which the prophet was called upon to expose. And in proportion to the daring of the enterprise, so did the prophet's powers expand. Deliberately he takes his stand at the Temple gate; loud and imperious is his call upon the attention of the worshippers; straight, clean-cutting are the words with which he addresses them. "Trust ye not in lying words, saying, The temple of Yahweh, the temple of Yahweh, the temple of Yahweh, are these. For if ye thoroughly amend your ways and your doings; if ye thoroughly execute judgement between a man and his neighbour; if ye oppress not the stranger, the fatherless, and the widow, and shed not innocent blood in this place, neither walk after other gods to your own hurt: then will I cause you to dwell in this place, in the land that I gave to your fathers, from of old, even for evermore."

It is not surprising that proceedings such as these on the part of a young and unknown man should have aroused opposition, an opposition exactly proportioned to the truth which was felt to be contained in his words, and to the sting with which they were driven home. Once we read of his being placed in the stocks; but the bitterest hostility was experienced, as might have

been expected, from the men of his own family and of his own class. Jeremiah came of a priestly race, which had long been established in power and affluence at Anathoth, a short distance north of Jerusalem. We are not told exactly who these priests were. There is no evidence of their having any connection with the central temple, and probably they were attached to the local sanctuary, and disestablished when Josiah's reforms were put in force. In any case, at the beginning of Jeremiah's ministry we find them firmly established, with a claim reaching back to antiquity, possessed of large estates, and wielding an imposing influence. To them his course of action must have seemed doubly treacherous, dealing blows both upon their material interests and the comfortable security of their existence, and also upon the orthodoxy in which they believed. Coupled with this fear for their own safety was the contempt, which must always be the result of familiarity, and fruitless anger, that one brought up in their traditions, imbued with their thoughts, should thus have broken away from his leading strings. The men of Anathoth laid a plot against him, determining to stop his mouth for ever. Jeremiah, by some means or other, became aware of the plot, and the knowledge causes him to writhe and cry like a wounded animal. For in this discovery we must find a sudden disillusionment, a crashing downfall of all the high and ardent hopes with which he had entered upon his mission. Possessed of a soul of the deepest simplicity and of guileless honesty, he had expected to find human nature as he knew it in himself; expected that men would eagerly grasp the truth once set before them; would meet him in genuineness and honesty; would be quick to acknowledge their errors

and mistakes. The brutal reality is almost overwhelming in its force to his sensitive soul, a soul capable of the utmost tender affection, yet here at one blow denied all access to it. His overthrown affection is at the first instance converted into a vehement vindictiveness against the plotters. But soon his thoughts turn upon his own position; the meaning and the usefulness of his whole life are called in question. "Righteous are Thou, O Yahweh, when I plead with Thee: yet would I reason the cause with Thee: Wherefore doth the way of the wicked prosper?" And later there comes upon him the overwhelming sense of his own loneliness, of the dreary hopelessness of the struggle which is in front of him. "If thou hast run with the footmen, and they have wearied thee, then how canst thou contend with horses? For even thy brethren, and the house of thy father, even they have dealt treacherously with thee: even they have cried aloud after thee: believe them not, though they speak good things unto thee." This was the first of many sorrowful days to the prophet, days of gloomy obscurity, of trouble, rebuke and blasphemy. Pining for human society and companionship, he is condemned to loneliness; longing oftentimes to cast his burden off, to become an ordinary man amongst his fellows, he is unable to do so. His message compels utterance. "If I say, I will not make mention of Him, nor speak any more in His name, then there is in mine heart as it were a burning fire, and I am weary with forebearing and I cannot contain." His anguish of soul during this troubled period is faithfully reflected in his book. Often he curses with bitter imprecations the very day of his birth, the fact of his own existence. And though at other times he rises to heights of calm

serenity and steadfast purpose, we feel that these are but transitory moments, ever liable to be broken in upon by the cruel reality. They are brief respites in the stormy passage, glimpses of happiness only too rapidly dispelled. "Blessed is the man that trusteth in Yahweh, and whose trust Yahweh is. For he shall be as a tree planted by the waters, and that spreadeth out his roots by the river, and shall not fear when heat cometh, but his leaf shall be green." And then, but a few words later, we see the knowledge now acquired, in spite of which he still felt himself able to rest in assurance upon Yahweh, "The heart is deceitful above all things, and it is desperately sick: who can know it? I, Yahweh, search the heart, I try the reins, even to give every man according to his ways, according to the fruit of his doings."

But during this period of such storm and darkness within the prophet's soul, stirring events were also being enacted in the world outside. Towards the close of the 7th century B.C. the long dormant power of Egypt was showing signs of returning life under the Libyan dynasty of Psammatik. Pharaoh Nechoh determined upon one supreme attempt to restore to his country the glories of the 18th dynasty. With a great army he marched from Egypt across the desert, and along the Philistines' plain to be met in the valley of Megiddo by Josiah, the vassal of Assyria. The latter was defeated and slain; and his son Jehoahaz, after a short reign of three months, was carried away captive to Egypt. His brother Jehoiachim then ascended the throne, to reign in comparative tranquillity for eleven years. The Egyptian triumphs were of an extremely transitory nature. Nechoh penetrated as far north as Carchemish

on the Euphrates, there to be met by Nebuchadrezzar, heir to the throne of Babylon, which country had finally wrested the world-power from the failing hands of its rival Assyria. There in the year 604, four years after his defeat of Josiah, the Egyptian monarch was completely crushed, and the power of Egypt extinguished for ever.

Jehoiachim, we have said, reigned in comparative tranquillity, but comparative only. A shallow-minded man of an excitable nature, he was unable to brook the secluded and true policy which Josiah had pursued. Symptoms of unquiet and turbulence were manifest throughout his reign, a restless chafing against the yoke, a smoke of smouldering rebellion. It was at the beginning of this reign that Jeremiah was brought under official notice. Standing within the court of that same Temple, at whose gates he had before uttered one of his most telling messages, he poured forth from the bottom of his heart the thoughts which rose in him, and kept not back a word. The message, if clear and straightforward, was similar to many which he must have uttered before. Yet something this time, perhaps the manner in which it was pronounced, perhaps the sacred character of the spot from which the fiery threat was hurled, "I will make this house like Shiloh, and will make this city a curse to all the nations of the world," drew upon the speaker the attention of the public. Something almost approaching a riot was the result. "The priests and the prophets and all the people laid hold on him, saying, 'Thou shalt surely die.'" The princes, who might correspond to the civil magistrates and military authorities, hurried to the scene of the uproar, and held an improvised court "in the entry of the



new gate of the Lord's house." The priests and prophets act the part of accusers. Jeremiah's defence is clear and lucid, uttered without doubt or hesitation. "Yahweh sent me to prophesy against this house and against this city all the words that ye have heard. Therefore now amend your ways and your doings and obey the voice of Yahweh your God : and Yahweh will repent Him of the evil that He hath pronounced against you. But as for me, behold I am in your hand : do with me as is good and right in your eyes. Only know ye for certain that, if ye put me to death, ye shall bring innocent blood upon yourselves and upon this city and upon the inhabitants thereof ; for of a truth Yahweh hath sent me unto you to speak these words in your ears." These words, spoken in the utmost extremity of danger, are worth pondering ; they are those of a genuine man, of a man who, seeing his goal in front, knew not how to turn aside from pursuing it. The princes and all the people, representing, it must be judged, the less bigoted and more sincere portion of the assembly, took him at his word, crying in the enthusiasm of the moment, " This man is not worthy of death ; for he hath spoken to us in the name of Yahweh our God." Their enthusiasm subsided, followed perhaps by a moment of doubtful wavering as to the next course to be taken. Then arose one of the elders, a man doubtless held in reverential respect, and addressed the assembly in words of measured wisdom. He reminded them of Micah's prophecies uttered two generations ago, of the fact that he had then been unmolested, and of the still more striking circumstance that, as the result of the king's humility and earnestness, the threatened destruction had not taken place. Another elder pointed the contrast



to these past days by instancing the recent case of Uriah, one who had uttered warnings similar to those of Jeremiah, and who had as the result been pursued as far as Egypt by Jehoiachim and there slain. Of the conclusion of these semi-judicial proceedings we are not informed. We only know that Jeremiah escaped unhurt. Yet lacking in results though this event at first sight appears to be, to Jeremiah it must have meant a great deal. It meant the public recognition of the claim, for which he had so long struggled, to be a prophet of Yahweh. He would still be lonely, a man of solitary life, of sorrowing heart, but he would no longer be obscure. Men would point him out with fear, and yet with pity in their hearts, as the prophet; they would turn their heads to look as he wended his way through the narrow streets, or mounted the Temple steps. Kings and princes would come to him for advice. But yet a year or two had to pass away ere Jeremiah was to arrive at his zenith of completed knowledge, of highest mental exaltation. A new star of fiercely glowing brilliancy had arisen above the horizon, Nebuchadrezzar, king of the Chaldeans, the great conqueror and civiliser. Him Jeremiah hailed as the one for whom he had long waited. He could now see by what means the events he had so long foretold were to be brought to pass. With lightning glance his eye pierced into the far future. Not only must Judah and Jerusalem fall before the onslaught of the new power, but all the nations of that ancient time, Egypt, Philistia, Edom, Ammon, and Moab, Israel's neighbours and kinsfolk, the great sea-faring cities of Tyre and Sidon, the rich realms of Arabia, the distant kings of the Elamites and the Medes. The rhapsody in which Jeremiah proclaims his vision

might be called the death-knell of a world-epoch. Hitherto the known world had consisted of a multitude of petty nations, constantly embroiled in wars and quarrels, one after another rising and falling in perpetual unrest like the waves of a troubled sea. This condition of things was now to give place to a new. In terror and destruction was the old order to be changed, was there to be ushered in the new one of great spreading empires, diffusing peace and security, affording scope for human energies and human thoughts such as the old world could never have provided. The terror and destruction of the change are the sounding notes of Jeremiah's vision, but running through, sustaining the whole, is the confident certainty of a new age to come, "Thus saith Yahweh, the God of Israel, unto me: Take the cup of the wine of this fury at My hand, and cause all the nations to whom I have sent thee to drink it. And they shall drink and reel to and fro and be mad, because of the sword that I will send among them. A noise shall come even to the end of the earth; for Yahweh hath a controversy with the nations, He will plead with all flesh." From that time Jeremiah walked with a certain step. We cannot say that happiness was his, for that he had long since put away from him. Henceforth a sustaining sense of calm conviction, the mellowness of ripened judgment was to uphold him. All doubts and hesitations were laid aside; God's purposes were now clear, and amidst the crashing downfall of an age he alone could stand immovable, serene, no longer troubled by any vicissitudes of outward fortune. In answer to all inquiries, whether from kings of Israel, or from the nations around, he does but point to Nebuchadrezzar, the servant of Yahweh. Let them submit

to him, accepting in patient sincerity the coming of the new order, and all will be well with them ; otherwise nothing but destruction can be in store. His advice, of course, was passed by unheeded. To men of common clay, petulant, short-sighted, struggling like wild animals caught in a snare, unable to see how or why they are trapped, ever hoping that in some way or another the forthcoming day will put an end to all their difficulties, it seemed unreal, unpractical, if not absolutely traitorous. The world was in a ferment of plots, coalitions, uprisings ; the mice vainly attempting to bell the cat, and one by one helplessly succumbing before her.

Eleven years after the beginning of his reign, Jehoiachim rebelled, a rebellion begun in rashness, and, as far as we know, prosecuted without vigour. The king himself was slain, and Jehoiachin, his son, succeeded to his unenviable position. Three months after the death of his father the city fell, and Jehoiachin was carried away to Babylon. With him went the flower of the population of Jerusalem, "all the princes and all the mighty men of valour, and all the craftsmen, and all the smiths ; none remained save the poorest sort of the people of the land." There in the broad flat country of Mesopotamia, so different from their own, the Judean nobility seem to have recognised, if tardily, the wisdom of Jeremiah's advice, "Build ye houses and dwell in them ; and plant gardens and eat the fruit of them. And seek the peace of the city whither I have caused you to be carried away captive, and pray unto Yahweh for it : for in the peace thereof shall ye have peace." For a while indeed they continued to hope that Jerusalem might yet be saved, and they themselves

restored to their country. But when the last flickering hope had died away they remained at peace. Far from the turbulence of politics, living under the protection of a powerful government, their thoughts were able to exercise themselves with ripened wisdom upon the events which had brought them into their present position; they were able now to see the truthfulness of the prophets' warnings, which they had so greatly misunderstood. And so there arose a new Judaism, the keynote of which was resignation, the waiting upon Yahweh, the patient looking forward to the declaration of His will. For they knew that their present condition was not to last for ever; even Jeremiah had seen that Babylon's overlordship would be but temporary, that one day she would be found unworthy of her trust, and then the exiles would be restored to their ancient home.

Meanwhile the prophet himself was left behind in Jerusalem in the midst of the diminished population. A new ruler had been placed in charge of them, Zedekiah, the young king's uncle. He was a man very similar in character to his brother Jehoiachim, but had a very different class of people over whom to rule. With the removal to Babylon of all the men of refinement and culture, the unruly and turbulent element came to the front. The new princes were men of coarse mould, of unbalanced enthusiasm, the prototypes of the fanatics who rent Jerusalem between them in the days of Titus. They doubtless gained the reins of power by impetuous force of character, their one idea was to free themselves from the shackles which embarrassed them, and they succeeded in infusing into their project a strength of backbone which the weak Jehoiachim and his courtiers could never have inspired. Lonely as Jeremiah had

always been before, he now found that life had become strangely dreary. If the folly and obstinacy of the old regime had been heart-rending, the brutality and callousness of the new was beyond all hope. And so he now speaks but seldom, he holds out no hopes, the only advice he offers is to surrender to the Chaldeans, or if the rulers will not do so, for their underlings to fall away to the enemy. He scarcely ever wastes breath in public, but restricts himself to answers given in reply to Zedekiah's enquiries, and those always reiterating the same advice. Indeed, through these dreary years, Zedekiah, weak and selfish though he is, is the only person who acts the part of a gentleman towards the prophet. He alone consults him on matters of importance, he alone accords him any respect. In all probability Zedekiah would have followed Jeremiah's advice and pursued a policy of quiet submission had he not been a tool in the hands of the popular leaders. They, for their part, regarded the prophet as an incumbrance, an obstacle to be swept out of their path. They were totally unable to understand him, whilst he could understand them only too well. The broad gulf dividing the prophet and his people was impassable. Under these circumstances the prophet's heart dwelt with longing upon the exiles. With the fondness of absence he is ready to forgive their errors in the past, to idealise their characters in the present. "Yahweh shewed me, and behold two baskets of figs set before the temple of Yahweh. One basket had very good figs, like the figs that are first ripe: and the other basket had very bad figs, which could not be eaten, they were so bad." Although the motives which prompt ordinary weak human nature are very obvious in having helped Jeremiah

to arrive at this conclusion, let us hasten to confess that he was perfectly right. In the exiles of Babylon, and in them alone, lay hope for the resurrection of the Hebrew race.

So passed the time, slow and halting enough for the man of loneliness, all too quick for those whose fate was rushing upon them. Nine years after Zedekiah had mounted the throne the city was closely invested. The Babylonian arrangements for its subjection were as thorough-going as might be ; by sword and by famine they were once for all determined to crush this arch-rebel amongst cities. Once only during the desperate conflict did hope brighten the beleaguered Israelites. That broken reed, the King of Egypt, was once more upon the march. The danger to the Babylonians was so imminent as to cause them to raise the siege hurriedly and march southwards. We can well imagine the flush of hope with which this unexpected deliverance was greeted. The Egyptians were now about to fulfil their long-deferred promises, and the troubles of Jerusalem would be at an end. Men could walk at length with light hearts, the troubles of the past an evil dream, the hope of the future full of pleasure and tranquillity. Into the midst of a city of jubilation and confidence was shot the prophet's doleful warning. " Behold, Pharaoh's army which is come forth to help you shall return to Egypt into their own land. And the Chaldeans shall come again and fight against this city ; and they shall take it and burn it with fire." This dread foreboding was only too well justified. We hear nothing of any action on the part of the Egyptian forces. They melted like phantoms, and the siege of Jerusalem was resumed. Jeremiah had taken occasion of the respite



to visit the family estate which had been left him at Anathoth. This harmless journey afforded sufficient pretext to the popular leaders, who were ever on the watch for an opportunity to remove the man of dismal forebodings out of their path. He was arrested on a charge, to the plausibility of which considerable colour was lent by his reiterated advice, of falling away to the Chaldeans. In spite of his indignant denials he was consigned to the common dungeon, a noisome enough receptacle. Rescued from thence by Zedekiah, he was kept in the king's own palace, and treated with all consideration, there remaining a prisoner until the siege came to an end. Once indeed the princes in angry clamour demanded his execution, and Zedekiah handed him over to their will. The relations of the king and his so-called subjects could not be better expressed than in Zedekiah's terse, but bitter irony, "Behold, he is in your hand: for the king is not he that can do anything against you." They contented themselves with throwing him again into the miry dungeon, whence he was rescued by Ebed-Melech, an Ethiopian servant of the king's, who prevailed upon Zedekiah to restore him to his former quarters, where he remained, as we have stated, until the conclusion of the siege. Here, whilst the forces of destruction within and without were hourly forcing back the city's resistance, an extraordinary transaction was effected by Jeremiah. Whilst every square foot of ground outside the walls of Jerusalem lay in the hands of the enemy he signed the deed of purchase, and paid the price for a field in Anathoth, belonging to one of his cousins. The meaning of the act must have been clear and striking, even without the prophet's explanations. It meant that in the days

to come Israelites would again be restored in peace and tranquillity to their country, that they would never be really divorced from her, but would possess again in security their own fields and vineyards. Indeed, during these last days the mellow light of a glorious evening is shed over the prophet's thought. His mind dwells upon the happy future, which he pictures in passages of surpassing beauty. "Behold I will bring Jerusalem healing and care, and I will care for them : and I will reveal unto them abundance of peace and truth. And this city shall be to Me for a name of joy, for a praise and for a glory, before all the nations of the earth, which shall hear all the good that I do unto them, and shall fear and tremble for all the peace that I procure unto it. Thus saith Yahweh : ' Yet again there shall be heard in this place, the voice of joy and the voice of gladness, the voice of the bridegroom and the voice of the bride, the voice of them that say, Give thanks to the Lord of Hosts, for the Lord is good, for His mercy endureth for ever.' "

With the fall of Jerusalem the real meaning of Jeremiah's existence seems to come to an end, as did that of Isaiah with its great deliverance. With that final event his life is complete and rounded off. But he is still hale and vigorous : years of sojourning and wandering still lie before him. And so with a complete wrench from the past he has to begin life over again. A choice of two courses lay before him. Either he might repair to Babylon, to spend there his declining years, an honoured guest of King Nebuchadrezzar, or he might stay with the remnant of the Hebrew people, prepared to endure all the vicissitudes of fortune which might be in store for them. Nebuchadrezzar had left

behind in Jerusalem only the very poorest section of the population, to whom he had parcelled out the land; thus administering in a rough-and-ready manner that justice which the prophets had so long demanded. The ruler of this primitive community was a certain Gedaliah, a brave and honest man; and under his governorship, beneath the sheltering power of Babylon, Jeremiah may well have looked forward to years of peaceful security and rural happiness. But such was not to be. Gedaliah, too noble and unsuspecting to take precautions against the jealousies of the neighbouring Ammonites, was murdered by one Ishmael, an emissary of their king, and all dreams of security rudely dispelled. The rest of the officials who were to direct the needs of the small community, fearful lest they might be suspected by the Babylonians of complicity in the deed, and anxious only for their own safety, determined on a flight to Egypt. Jeremiah, after careful deliberation, gave his advice in favour of remaining at home and courting a full investigation. For the last time his warnings were neglected. The unworthy shepherds deserted their post, and carried with them the prophet, in spite of all his expostulations. Settled in Egypt, their character underwent a rapid degeneration. They greedily assimilated all the well-known features of the Egyptian worship, burning incense unto other gods and serving the Queen of Heaven. Once again are Jeremiah's denunciations hurled. The sword of Nebuchadrezzar will pass through the land of Egypt, devouring alike Egyptians and renegade Israelites. "I will take the remnant of Judah that have set their faces to go into the land of Egypt to sojourn there, and they shall all be consumed; in the land of Egypt shall they fall; they

shall be consumed by the sword and by the famine ; they shall die, from the least even unto the greatest, by the sword and by the famine ; and they shall be an execration and an astonishment and a curse and a reproach." So in one last fiery warning the curtain falls upon the final act of this troubled life.

To say that Jeremiah was sincere and genuine, that his was a nature incapable of harbouring one mean thought, one petty or selfish motive, would be almost to state a truism. He could not have been a great prophet otherwise. For the greatest prophets are those who approach the most closely to the truth ; and only they can approach the truth whose natures are intrinsically true. The one prominent fact which must strike our imagination as we follow him through life is his loneliness. He founds no school, he has no disciples, no wife or family to cheer him. The only real friends we read of are Baruch his devoted secretary, Ebed-Melech the eunuch, and one or two others, who, moved by respect or pity, offered him their help in various emergencies. And then there is the reverse side of the picture, a soul of almost womanly tenderness, capable of the utmost affection, one to which the companionship of kindred, loving spirits would have meant the whole joy of life. We have seen how during the earlier years he cried out in the agony of his loneliness ; how, as knowledge widened and insight deepened, he became resigned, confident, and cheerful. Yet his was not a nature which could thrust affection aside, which, rejoicing in its strength and serenity, could pursue a grand and lonely path, overlooking the little affairs of man. For that companionship and affection which were denied him he longed until the end ; a man who could not

be of the world, yet was not so great as to rise completely above it. A true man, of nature clear as crystal and sincere, he clung to truth. Stony and steep might be the track, murky the darkness, awesome the yawning abyss, yet never once did he turn aside from the straight and narrow path which alone can ever lead to life.

## CHAPTER VIII.

### EZEKIEL.

MENTION has already been made of one clear note which was struck from the hearts of the exiled Israelites, the note of patient resignation and wistful hope, of waiting for Yahweh's fulfilment of the promises so often declared by Him through the mouths of His servants the prophets. The earnest, sincere, humble souls who had caught something of the teaching of Jeremiah, who had felt something of the attraction and sympathy exerted by his personality, were those who cherished this hope. But alongside of this hope was another, in many ways lower, in others more human and passionate, the ardent hope of restoration and revenge, not by waiting for the action of Yahweh, but by helping it along, by carrying out in every detail His demands laid upon His people, and by thus, as it were, compelling Him to assert His power and might in their favour. Both the new ideals were consequent upon that total change in the national circumstances, and consequently in the national outlook, which was occasioned by the destruction of their country and by their exile in a foreign land. The second of these two ideals is that which most obviously marks the subsequent history of Judaism. It is that which is at once clear and striking to the eye which seeks only for outward appearances ; but the first is that wherein the life of Judaism lay. Confined as it must necessarily have been in every generation to a few, probably insignificant individuals, this ideal, with its eye to truth,



with its timid quiescence, provided a soul without which all further history would have been dead and meaningless. From the time of Jeremiah it would almost be safe to say no generation was without its quota of obscure seekers after truth, the unknown, the oft-times oppressed, who waited for the redemption of Israel, whose scattered voices, yet strong in purpose, steadfast in hope, inspiring and ennobling in their truth and earnestness, have been preserved for us in the book of Psalms, who at last, after six hundred years travail, found a representative in One whose words must reach unto the ends of the earth, without Whom all the goodness and all the greatness of nineteen centuries past, of the unknown thousands which lie hidden in the dark shadow of the time to come, would have been as buds nipped by the frost, as weakling plants scorched by the summer sun. But to trace this under-current, real as it is—the one real thing in post-exilic Jewish history—would be an impossible task. Only there may be noted an occasional swirl upon the flowing surface of the stream indicative of the forces at work beneath. The historian must confine himself to the events which are obvious, to the thoughts which were commonly thought, which men were not shy to utter; thoughts which, however commonplace, hackneyed, withered or dead they may seem, are yet the only background against which the truer and the more living can ever be thrown into relief. By the hard rubs of fortune the teaching of the prophets, from Amos to Jeremiah, was branded deep upon the conscience of Israel. The wrongfulness of their past life was admitted, the truthfulness of the prophets' pictures conceded. Henceforth they would put away shams, would serve Yahweh in sobriety and earnestness,

would rely upon Him alone. The words are such as were used continually by an Isaiah, or a Jeremiah ; but how different the meaning ! For the exiles of Israel *could not* in fact understand the teaching and meaning of their great men, any more than a blind man can understand the laws which regulate colour. All they could do was to give the prophets' words some meaning such as could be clearly grasped, and upon that with energy and enthusiasm, if necessary with fanaticism, act. Nor was the change of mind and outlook effected without intermediaries. Already it has been noted that the torrents which pour down the mountain side, the springs which bubble up in the limestone hills, must be conducted through many channels, through pipes and cisterns, before they can be of use for sustaining the life of mankind. Such a channel was Ezekiel. The last great man of what may be called Israel's prophetic era, he took up the teaching of his predecessors, he moulded it into a form which could be grasped firmly by the men of his generation, and he presented it to them as the final, unswerving purpose of Yahweh their God. He thus became in his own person the very type and embodiment of post-exilic Judaism, almost the final expression of the ideals which animated the nation. Not that his task was by any means an easy one. If he stood half-way down the slope which led from the prophetic heights to the level of common intelligence, the people to whom he addressed himself had to be induced to climb half-way up to meet him. When taken into exile the Jews differed from other nations which had suffered a like fate only in having possessed a line of men who had warned them against the course they were pursuing, and pointed out to them the one way to safety.

Only as far as she had paid heed to their warnings, and this was little enough, could Israel be said to differ in the least from the ordinary men of the other petty and subdued nationalities. To her, as to each of them, the one object of desire, the one conclusion to which history was believed somehow or other to be tending, was the restoration of her own independence and power. So long as Jerusalem stood there were still hopes of national life, intrigues with the king of Egypt might still bear fruit, alliances and victories might still restore the honour of their country and rescue them from their servile position. In such a temper, restless, ambitious, full of unfruitful schemes, did Ezekiel find the exiles at the beginning of his ministry, 592 B.C. Their constitutions had not been altered by the reverses of fortune; and on the plains of Babylon they remained the same hopeful, short-sighted men as they had been within the walls of Jerusalem. Ezekiel took upon himself the duty of enlightening them. A strong, stern, self-contained man, his own mind completely made up, he received this duty as a strong man might shoulder a heavy load; like a trusted sentinel he took up his post as watchman to the nation. If the resistance offered him was as adamant, like that of a blank, polished wall, he would be stonier, and more determined still; an uncompromising kind of man, who yet could be understood, and could one day completely win because he had gauged beforehand the temper of the age and had prepared the appropriate medicines before even the sick man had realised his plight. For the first few years indeed his task was hard and stern enough; he was to stand a solitary figure, to set his face resolutely against the people of Israel. Until the knowledge that Jerusalem was

doomed, that in no continuance of the dying past could there be hope, had been burnt in upon their inmost consciences, nothing more could be done. And so this first period is occupied by examples in pantomime, and through word of mouth intended to impress upon the mind this elementary fact. "Ye are a rebellious house." Such is his constant refrain. When men come to him for advice he scorns them superciliously; he will give no advice and no directions unless they first confess that they are on the wrong road, and obediently commence to retrace their steps. In long drawn out similes he narrates the history of Jerusalem and of Samaria, dwells upon their ingratitude and their rebellions, and points the inevitable warnings.

And through all he cherished, if only in fleeting glimpses, the hope that he might succeed, that the stony heart would one day become a heart of flesh, that Yahweh's people at last would determine to obey His statutes and His ordinances. That day was nearer than even Ezekiel himself probably dared to hope. The wedge upon which blow after blow was being rained, with apparently a most trifling effect, was in reality on the point of penetrating into a far-stretching fissure, upon its entrance into which the whole edifice would be cracked from top to bottom. As the final catastrophe approaches, the prophet's attitude towards the people undergoes a change; prophet and people are to be drawn close together, aloofness is to give place to earnest partnership. The death of his own wife at the very time that Jerusalem is invested seems to Ezekiel typical of the sorrows through which Israel was now to pass. He endures his bereavement silently, he neglects all the customary methods of displaying grief for the dead; and on being

questioned as to the meaning of this non-observance, his words strike a note of tender pathos unheard before. "Behold I will profane My sanctuary, the pride of your power, the desire of your eyes, the pity of your soul ; and your sons and your daughters whom ye have left behind shall fall by the sword. And ye shall do as I have done ; ye shall not cover your lips nor eat the bread of men." The meaning is, that they, like himself, are to bear the agony of their heart silently, bracing themselves for the re-building in the future of their shattered hopes. The effect produced by this action, the silent sorrow of the stern man, coming as it did at so striking a moment, must have been of the greatest. We can imagine his enquirers departing in silent thought ; new thoughts, new ideas all unknown before were rising in their minds. With the walls of Jerusalem visibly tottering, the fallacy of all their hopes must have been manifest, the bottomless nature of the quagmire in which they had so long been struggling have been clearly discerned. How long the transition period lasted, how long it was from the beginning of the first vague stirrings before prophet and people became united into one organic whole, one looking forward, it is impossible to say. The revulsion of opinion was probably fairly rapid, occupying a year or two at the utmost. Ezekiel's glad triumph is celebrated in the well-known image of the valley of dead bones, a picture which must not be taken as portraying his hopes for a remote future, but as actually describing the process which he had seen passing before his eyes. The exact moment depicted is that in which the Israelites have finally thrown aside all their old hopes, and are hesitating before their hold is once for all tightened upon the new. "So I prophesied as



He commanded me, and the breath came into them, and they lived, and stood up upon their feet, an exceeding great army. Then He said unto me, 'Son of Man, these bones are the whole house of Israel : Behold they say, " Our bones are dried up and our house is lost ; we are clean cut off." ' ' And then there follows a sketch of the hoped-for future, a future not like those futures cherished by Isaiah and Jeremiah, whose glories break upon us like a summer sunrise behind grey clouds, upon which a light is shed not altogether of this earth, a mellow golden light of beauty and goodness and far-off longing. Ezekiel's future is real, concrete, practicable, as real as to a schoolboy are his coming holidays. " I will take the children of Israel from among the nations whither they be gone, and will gather them on every side, and bring them into their own land ; they shall not defile themselves any more with their idols, nor with their detestable things, nor with any of their transgressions. And My servant David shall be king over them ; and they all shall have one shepherd ; they shall also walk in My judgements and observe My statutes and do them. Moreover, I will make a covenant of peace with them : it shall be an everlasting covenant with them and I will give it them and multiply them, and will set My sanctuary in the midst of them for evermore. And the nations shall know that I am Yahweh that sanctifies Israel, when My sanctuary shall be in the midst of them for evermore." Such are the main outlines of the scheme ; to fill in its every detail was from that time Ezekiel's main occupation. Before the final consummation there will be one last onrush of the nations against Israel ; typified by their leaders Gog and Magog, they will swarm up in their thousands, only to meet



with drastic punishment at the hands of Yahweh, and the burial of their corpses will not be completed until seven years have passed. "Thus," does Ezekiel imagine Yahweh to say, "I will magnify Myself and sanctify Myself, and I will make Myself known in the eyes of many nations ; and they shall know that I am Yahweh." After this final example the sanctuary of Yahweh will be left unmolested by the nations ; ransomed Israel will live its own life in the completest of all possible securities. The characteristic features of this life Ezekiel dwelt upon with peculiar pleasure. He seems almost to imagine himself present upon the scene, moving hither and thither, arranging one thing, laying down rules as to another, welding the whole into a perfect order and symmetry fit for the holy governance of Yahweh. Into the details of this scheme it is unnecessary for us to enter at any length. They may all be found in the last nine chapters of his book. The world depicted is one of peace and security, of well-regulated method and perfect order, a world withal of strange silence, where men seem to steal furtively as though fearful of making any noise, where all is clean and swept and bright, where the sun is always shining, not so brilliantly as to dazzle, or so fiercely as to scorch, but with a mild steady lustre, sufficient just to provide the comfort that men need. Life is uneventful ; its one interest lies in the sacrifices which must be offered in honour of Yahweh. But then the new Israelites demand no more excitement ; quiet service of their God will suffice them for ever. Everything is planned out, the dwellings are all arranged, the different proportions of the various classes of the community are all settled. The new David will not have much in common with the

old. His only duty will be to offer sacrifice at stated intervals, but otherwise to remain quiet and accept the general arrangements. A well-conceived, finely wrought, completely rounded-off picture, but what if it will not work, what if human nature will not fit? This criticism may appear to the reader remarkably obvious. But let him recollect that such schemes belong not only to the age of Ezekiel. Even to-day they are entertained, and that widely; the notion of them is spread broadcast over the land. It is true that our ideas of temples have somewhat changed. Sacrifice will not now be the main business of life, rather buying and selling. But there is cast over the prospect the same mild sunny radiance; there is the same "spick and span"-ness, the same perfect cleanliness. In the new world ladies will drive up in well-appointed carriages and noiseless motors; they will effect their purchases at the clean, bright municipal stores, where every article supplied will be guaranteed of the very best. Even if, an exceptional possibility, anything does go wrong, a complaint lodged at headquarters will receive immediate, assiduous attention. Men's lives will be mapped out and regulated, all difficulties will be removed, all roughnesses smoothed away. If a man is ambitious, he will rise by a regular series of ascertained gradations; if not, he will remain where he is and be happy. Strange it is that we change but little through the ages. In one important respect indeed our modern proposals must seem the more practical. Ezekiel relied for the establishment and support of the new order upon Yahweh alone; an ample guarantee, it might be thought, for was not Yahweh ruler and regulator of the whole earth? Yes; but only so probably in Ezekiel's own imagination. We with our

commonsense, born of the 19th century, will entrust the ordering of our new worlds to real flesh-and-blood municipal councillors. In this connection it is well to bear in mind that Ezekiel's picture was not, any more than the schemes which are broached to-day, the product of a vivid, but isolated, imagination, no mere dreamer's Utopia. On the contrary, it faithfully reflects the spirit of the age, it represents the common ideal and the common hope towards which all men were striving. Nor was this ideal and hope merely transient. For centuries the Jewish nation kept it steadily in view amidst success and adversity, through thick and through thin they strove to attain it. Little by little, step by step, sometimes even with one convulsive leap, they approximated towards it, only to be on every occasion hurled back by the cruel pressure of circumstance, obstructed by foes without, diverted by their own angry passions within. We cannot say how many, as yet unrevealed, lessons for the present age are to be found in the history of the Jewish race through the ensuing seven centuries.

Ezekiel stands out before us in two characters. He was a man who was successful in implanting his own ideals upon his generation, and implanting them in such a way that they were never afterwards forgotten ; yet although far more immediate success came to him than to his great forerunners, in mental calibre he is inferior to Isaiah or Jeremiah. If their minds are first-rate, his must be described as of the second order. For in an attempt to sum up the character and work of Ezekiel we must not be misled into supposing that because he was completely successful he was therefore completely great. For success must ever depend not

so much on greatness of mind and character, as on their completeness. Though the lustre with which Ezekiel shines was not his own, though he stood far below the distant heights from which he derived his inspiration, yet in that he was a complete man ; in that his eye was single, his purpose strong, he was bound to win. His light, reflected though it was, shone steadily, like a full moon in the clear sky, by whose beams the traveller may in confidence direct his way. Many others there have been, minds of the highest calibre, which have yet never attained completion, whose lamps have burned fitfully, gustily, whose light has finally been extinguished amidst the agonies of remorse and self-despair. These are the men of genius who have faltered at sight of the stony track, who have tried to serve two masters, whose lives have in consequence been one drawn-out tragedy. A second-rate mind, let it but attain completion, may wield an influence in history, judged that is to say by the superficial appearance of that hurrying stream, infinitely greater than that exercised by one of the first. rank, which has yet never come to certainty of itself. But wherein consists the difference between a mind which is intrinsically first-rate, and one which can never hope to rise above the second class ? Perhaps in comparing Ezekiel with his predecessors, with an Isaiah or a Jeremiah, some partial answer to the question may be obtained. The first salient point which must strike us in such a comparison is Ezekiel's rigidity. The elastic buoyancy of mind with which the older prophets looked out upon the turmoiled course of the great business of life is gone. They were like well-built vessels crossing a stormy sea, vessels which answered instantaneously to every touch of the helm, whose course could continually

be readjusted and altered, as unforeseen requirements might arise. He is a locomotive fixed down to a pair of rails, unable to turn towards this side or towards that, his only course to go straight forward. Fortunate it was for him that the rails upon which he was journeying were true, that they led to the desired destination. Had it been otherwise, had some unforeseen accident intervened, utter ruin, irretrievable obscurity, must have been his lot ! It is this rigidity, as opposed to buoyancy, which must ever be the one unmistakable sign of a second-rate mind. Its influence may be traced in every one of Ezekiel's conceptions, in every region into which his intellect penetrated. In the way in which he regards his relations towards Yahweh is this chiefly and pre-eminently shown. The older prophets had felt themselves to stand in Yahweh's council chamber, they had known themselves to be His trusted officers, the privileged possessors of His secrets. Ezekiel, on the other hand, might be compared to the private soldier, stubborn, true, determined, who has been entrusted by his general with a message to be carried through the enemy's ranks. He receives the order and that is all. No sooner is he started than his general becomes to him a voice which has once spoken, which may never speak again ; miles of country separate them, and all he can do is to go straight forward, implicitly trusting that the arrangements which were explained to him before setting out will remain unaltered until he has got well through. If the older prophets, as they undoubtedly did, thought of Yahweh essentially as a man, yet He was a man infinitely above us men, whose ways were not as our ways, nor His thoughts as our thoughts, one who must ever be waited

upon, whose doings must ever be largely scanned, if haply we are to catch even fleeting glimpses into His hidden purposes and meaning. In Ezekiel's mind, however, the ruler of the universe is rapidly degenerating from a real human being into a set of principles, the world, that is to say, is becoming mechanical and therefore dead, its motion fixed for ever, its interest departed.

The principles which represent to Ezekiel the personality of Yahweh are His wrath and His jealousy. Not but what there was truth, even vast truth, in the conception; for there is no thought that has ever been thought but must have had a basis of truth upon which it finally rested. To find a great truth, then to pin it down, to leave all other truths out of sight, to establish it as the absolute, the one, the everlasting, the indestructible; such is the work of a strong, but of a second-rate mind. It will be well then to consider shortly wherein the truth of Ezekiel's conceptions lay. Yahweh's wrath is His wrath against the nations of the world. Jeremiah too, like Ezekiel, had foreseen their destruction. Yet how different were the two methods of expressing the same idea. Jeremiah had seen that the nations were doomed, therefore such must be Yahweh's will, their fall must be but a great advance in the never-ending world-progress. Ezekiel believed that Yahweh's wrath burned fiercely against the nations, therefore they must be destroyed; a very different matter. The reasoning and the deductions which lay at the bottom of both men's conclusions must have been the same, how different the manner in which the conclusions are expressed. For what is this wrath of Yahweh? It is the fierce pent-in anger of a baffled, deadly serious people, patriotism which has lost the



fiery eagerness and buoyant hope of youth, and has become the stubborn determination of an embittered manhood. In hopeless fury, a fury to which Ezekiel alone has given permanent utterance, the exiled Israelites had watched the events which followed upon the destruction of Jerusalem. With the retreat to Egypt of Johanan and the other captains whom Nebuchadnezzar had left for the protection of the country, the little Jewish community in Palestine was left utterly defenceless. The Ammonite and the Edomite swarmed up over the table-land, occupying in insolent superiority the depopulated territory. Even before this the neighbouring nations had openly exulted in the approaching downfall of Jerusalem. "Moab and Seir do say, Behold the house of Judah is like unto all the nations; therefore I will execute judgements upon Moab, and they shall know that I am Yahweh." The children of Ammon had said, "Aha, against My sanctuary when it was profaned; and against the land of Israel when it was made desolate," therefore Yahweh will destroy them, and they shall know that He is Yahweh. "Because that Edom hath dealt against the house of Judah by taking vengeance, and hath greatly offended and revenged herself upon them; therefore I will lay My vengeance upon Edom by the hand of My people Israel: and they shall do in Edom according to Mine anger and according to My fury; and they shall know My vengeance, saith Yahweh God." "Because the Philistines have dealt by revenge, and have taken vengeance with despite of soul to destroy it with perpetual enmity; therefore I will execute great vengeance upon them with furious rebukes; and they shall know that I am Yahweh when I shall lay My vengeance upon them." Tyre too,

she that dwells at the entry of the sea, who is the merchant of the peoples unto many isles, whose borders are in the heart of the seas, whose builders have perfected her beauty, is to suffer a like fate. "Because she hath said against Jerusalem, 'Aha, she is broken that was the gate of the peoples; she is turned unto me; I shall be replenished now that she is laid waste.' Therefore thus saith the Lord God: 'Behold I am against thee, O Tyre. And I will make thee a bare rock: thou shalt be a place for the spreading of nets; thou shalt be built no more, for I Yahweh have spoken it.' " Egypt too will not escape punishment, for she has been a fickle stay, a staff of reed to the house of Israel. Thus was sown, deep, strong, and vital the seed of that deadly, poisonous hatred which vitiates the whole of Israel's after-history. But there is also Yahweh's jealousy. This is directed towards Israel. If the other nations have to tremble before His wrath, Israel must above all guard against His jealousy. This means that she must worship Him and Him alone; every set of ritual must be such as the prophets have prescribed. It must have no connexion with, nothing to provoke recollection of, the old licentious, genial rites. A stern fulfilment of the round of sacrificial duty and worship must in future be that which binds Israel to Yahweh. If Israel thus sternly fulfils her duty, Yahweh on His part will execute her vengeance upon her enemies. So runs the new creed. It is in this form, muddy and stony enough, impregnated with the offscourings of mountain and of plain, that the prophets' radiant hopes and promises have at last been deposited upon this earth of ours.

We can scarcely say good-bye to Ezekiel without

some consideration of that with which his name is in all probability most usually connected—his doctrine, namely, of rewards and punishments. Like all else connected with the man, it is mechanical, rigid, yet based at bottom upon the solid ground of experience, attractive from its very startling clearness and simplicity. “What mean ye, that ye use this proverb concerning the land of Israel, saying, ‘The fathers have eaten sour grapes and the children’s teeth are set on edge’? As I live, saith the Lord God, ye shall not have occasion any more to use this proverb in Israel. Behold, all souls are Mine; as the soul of the father, so also the soul of the son is Mine: the soul that sinneth it shall die.” “Son of Man, when a land sinneth against Me by committing trespass, though these three men, Noah, Daniel, and Job were in it, they should deliver but their own souls by their righteousness.” Exact retribution immediately following every crime, exact reward consequent upon goodness, such is Ezekiel’s conception of the ordering of this world’s course; an ordering we must ever bear in mind which was not to be finally completed in a future existence but was being worked out here, now, immediately. In the forthcoming fall of Jerusalem he devoutly, whole-heartedly, believes that true followers of Yahweh will be preserved, all the rest destroyed. In the old patriarchal and subsequent days up to the time of the kingdom the solution to the question of justice and retribution, as to all other questions, had been simple. God above was perfectly just, and meted out impartially rewards and punishments to all men. Not that in those fresher days there was anything of fixity or rigidity in the notion. In those fresh optimistic days when men more nearly understood one

another, troubles were scarce, and, if bitter while lasting, were nevertheless of short duration. They could be borne with the cheerfulness which looks forward to a sunny morrow, and a clear conscience would carry the good man through all. Besides, men lived then not so much for themselves as for their family or their tribe. In the fate of the whole lay that of every individual ; the sorrows of the family are his sorrows, their joys his joys. Apart from them he is as nothing, a hopeless wanderer in a desert world, a dead leaf whirling before the wind. And so arose the perfectly natural thought, a thought borne out moreover by all the experience and facts of life, that the sins of the fathers are visited upon the children, and likewise the fathers' goodness is rewarded through successive generations. This view of a perfect impartial justice, confined however not to individuals but to families, became what may be called the traditional orthodoxy of Israel during the days of the kingdom. Yet as life became more complicated, society more sub-divided, its inadequacy as an explanation became ever more evident. When a man was no longer tied closely to his family, but could leave it to pursue, in the king's service or in foreign adventures, an altogether different mode of existence, it can have been but little comfort in case of failure or starvation to think he was suffering for the sins of ancestors who were to him merely names. Again, while in the patriarchal days the doctrine had been for all practical purposes true, in the later days, during the decline of the kingdom, it was obviously and glaringly untrue. Not only were the good and the honest obviously crushed and down-trodden, but the unscrupulous and the proud were piling up wealth and honours ; nor could the suppositions that

they suffered from evil consciences, or that their end was sudden and terrible, afford any lasting consolation to those whom they had wrongfully despoiled. In the tragedy of the book of Job, written we know not when, is depicted the horror and anguish which the utter breakdown of the old revered beautiful view of life afflicts upon an earnest, sensitive and deeply religious soul, in every instinct conservative, compelled by very nature through all adversities to believe only in the good. And so, as the age hurried to its end, as not only the poor and the miserable, but the rich and the prosperous likewise, became engulfed in the general stream of misfortune, a sense of rankling injustice pervaded the whole community, a fierce discontent finding its vent in the angry reiteration of the popular proverb, "The fathers have eaten sour grapes, and the children's teeth are set on edge." Jeremiah notes the prevailing temper, but passes it by, while allowing something of its justice. In the new age of which he dreams the proverb will be no more applicable. "In those days they shall utter it no more. But everyone shall die for his own iniquity ; every man that eateth the sour grapes, his teeth shall be set on edge." Ezekiel, the strong and dauntless, faces it, and exposes it. It is a lie. The men of Jerusalem and of the exile are suffering not for their fathers' sins, but for their own. It is their rebellion against Yahweh, and that alone, which is bringing their troubles upon them. We can imagine the effect of this announcement uttered at such a crisis with so great force and energy. After their change of attitude they humbly and sincerely admitted its truth ; it was indeed for them not only true then, but always, absolutely, finally true. Thus the old orthodoxy, when obviously at its last

expiring stage, received suddenly and marvellously a new lease of life, and robbed indeed of its elasticity, its cloudlike uncertainty, but given instead a certain fixity and solid strength, was carried forward into the age to come.

Perhaps it may seem a dreary legacy, so mechanical, so pedantic, which Ezekiel left for his people. Yet it must ever be remembered that all its greatness and sterling worth were due to the man; whilst its failures, its pedantry, its utter impossibility, are those of a nation. For Ezekiel was no remote fanatic, aloof from mankind; had he been so he could have effected nothing. In his fierce heart beat the heart of a people, a people which had just come from passing through a dread crisis; his soul, in all its thoughts, in all its ideals, reflected theirs. And if oft-times the reflection so given seems hard, unattractive, repellent, yet again it sometimes thrills with a tender pathos, a quiet glow of hope. "I will bring them out from the peoples, and gather them from the countries, and will bring them into their own land: and I will feed them upon the mountains of Israel by the water-courses. I will feed them with a good pasture, and upon the mountains of the height of Israel shall their fold be: there shall they lie down in a good fold, and on fat pasture shall they feed upon the mountains of Israel." If we could put ourselves into the position of those ancient Israelites, strangers in that flat unfamiliar land, would not these words tell us of a heart-sickness which reaches down to the farthest depths of human longing?

We have accompanied Israel to the parting of the ways. The past is dead and put away; the unknown future lies in store. And now we cannot leave her without one



glance back of sad regret upon the days which are gone. For with all their errors and follies those were after all halcyon days, full of a healthy joy, the happy thoughtless school-time of those ancient nations. If fighting was the main end of life, hatreds were unknown. A fair give-and-take was the order of the day. If your neighbour blacks your eye severely, a tooth knocked out will afford ample compensation. But school-days cannot last. Israel is now full-grown with a determination completely developed, a will no longer waxing and waning in flighty enthusiasm, but bent to a great purpose, yet with a temper morose, sullen, revengeful, which portends but ill for her future.

## CHAPTER IX.

### CONCLUSION.

WE have attempted in some measure to trace the growth of an idea, to discern something of its living power as down the ages it was passed from man to man, from soul to soul. Felt first as a vague, if potent, impulse, by a nomadic wanderer, we have beheld it raised to lofty heights of noblest serenity, we have seen it at last, however debased, however contaminated, in some measure realised by one nation inhabiting this earth, appropriated, fixed as the main principle and stay of life. The idea may be summed up as that of a God of truth, who rules over the affairs of men, who urges them ever onwards; for truth must contain within itself justice and mercy and everything else which is beautiful and good for mankind. We have watched the conflict of this with that other idea, so natural to man, so attractive, in many ways so beautiful, the natural against the supernatural, the one bidding man luxuriate in what he is and in what Nature with her glorious hues, her ever-compelling charm, is around him; the other beckoning him on and upwards to what he is not yet, to what he may one day become. We have caught, as it were, fleeting glimpses of this idea borne aloft in the forefront of a furious fight, with anxious attention we have watched it, no longer bravely waving, but drooping, swaying, seeming about to fall and disappear for ever; yet before the hand of its last bearer has altogether failed and it is lost and gone, another is ready to seize

it, to wave it aloft once more. If we have in ever so little a degree made of its life and growth a living motion like that of a living man and not the mere joining up of links in a dead-weight of heavy chain, our task will have had its ample reward. The present writer is fully aware that the line of development he has attempted to sketch is not that commonly accepted by our modern Biblical scholars and critics. On one fundamental point both he and they are in agreement. Both admit that here are two definite, distinct ideas, which, having once obtained clear consciousness of their own separate existence, are henceforth and for ever at enmity; both agree that the one proceeded from the other, the best and greatest being the latest born in time. But here the agreement ends. Whilst he regards this new idea as having come into existence, with, as it were, a sudden convulsion, a complete breaking off on the part of an insignificant family unit from all its old associations and habits of life, they regard it as having developed equably, quietly, almost insensibly, out of the old. The modern critical theory, as far as it can be discovered, for its exact shapes are shifty and uncertain, its appearance like that of morning clouds in ever-varying contour evading the brush of him who would give them fixity, seems to be as follows: In the earlier period of its existence the religion of Israel was exactly the same as that of all the other nations around; that is to say, happy, naturalistic. Not until shortly before the appearance of the first writing prophets, Amos and Hosea, did the new idea of a God of righteousness over all the earth, who demands justice and mercy, come into concrete existence. During this short pre-prophetic period, under the inspiration of the new thought, were written

most of the historic works contained in the Old Testament, the patriarchal narratives, the stories of the flight from Egypt, and the conquest of Palestine, the earlier histories of the kings. If this be accepted by the critics as even a moderately clear and accurate description of their theory, we must admit that as a theory it is concise and neat and thinkable enough. What then does it lack? It lacks reality. Can one of the critics make his theory live and move for us in the light of day? Can they give us so much as one passing glimpse into the way real men thought and felt whilst passing from the old ways to the new? Can they describe the human motives, the hopes, the fears, the far-off ideals, which led to the writing of those stories? If they can, they have not yet done so. Some talk of development and evolution, of the "lower" and of the "higher," an assumption that a "lower" thought, wherever and by whomsoever uttered, must be of an earlier date than a "higher," this is all we get. Even of the prophets, whose writings remain, authentic and genuine enough, no life-like description can be given, so vitiating is the effect of a false hypothesis. In the books of the critics they are no longer men, no longer human beings of energy, of fiery passion; their label is now "ethical monotheism," their teaching a collection of several well-assorted principles. All their references to the past, to the escape from Egypt, which was to them the real beginning of Israelitish history, the first putting forth of His power by Yahweh, are treated practically as so many harmless delusions. And yet who can read the words of the prophets with any meed of sympathy and not know that they felt themselves their every thought and ideal to be rooted deeply, firmly in the past history of their

nation? Not that they were, it is almost needless to remark, sentimental yearners after the "good old times," but that the ideals of the past came through their powerful personalities, ever fresh and vigorous, full of meaning for the present also. Must not this past have been true? Can any strong ideal, in particular any such ideal as that which spurred an Amos or an Isaiah, be founded upon a lie, and upon a delusion? And if we accept the truth of that past, of that wonderful deliverance from Egypt, can we hesitate to accept a past still more remote? If Moses did not arouse the dejected, degraded Israelites, by an appeal, as the Bible tells us he did, to instincts long dormant, yet instincts which had come down from a free and a noble ancestor, how then did he arouse them? No answer has been supplied to this question; history has no answer to supply. And so we get back to Abraham, his wanderings and his faith. Much yet remains to be cleared up in connexion with the patriarchal narratives. How much of them is due to retentive memory? How much is the report of actual facts which happened? How much, again, later embellishment? To these questions no definite answers have as yet been given. Of one thing only we may be certain—that there once was a man named Abraham, from whom by union and descent was sprung the Hebrew nation; that he was similar to the man described for us in the Bible; that his ideals and his faith were not unlike those of which we are told. This must be so. Otherwise history is paralysed at the commencement, and like a marionette whose strings have been cut, its action is brought to a dead-still. Even if we moderns are so blind, or so ungrateful as not to recognise it, future ages will gladly

and in sincerity acknowledge the truth which we have inherited in our Book of Books.

Nor can this idea, even in those ancient times, have been altogether completely confined to the people of Israel. With them indeed it reached its highest, grandest elevation ; but there can never have been a nation which did not feel, however inchoately, however confusedly, some impulse towards truth and towards duty. It cannot be mere accident that linked intimately the greatest of Israel's prophets with the great world-conquerors of the East, an Isaiah with a Sennacherib, a Jeremiah with a Nebuchadrezzar, and one whose voice cried later of hope to an exiled nation with Cyrus the Persian. The links which bound them must have been real and true, heart attracted to heart, existing not only in the prophets' imagination, but in the objective world without. These men, the preachers and the conquerors, both in their own spheres knew themselves to be tools, the servants of that Power who rules the universe. Scattered hints only do we get that this was so ; but they are sufficient. " Am I now come up without Yahweh against this land to destroy it ? " So speaks Sennacherib's officer to the men of Jerusalem, " Yahweh said unto me, ' Go up against this land and destroy it.' " Of Nebuchadrezzar we only know that he was an ardently pious man. But Cyrus' proclamation has come down to us, " All the kingdoms of the earth hath Yahweh, the God of heaven, given me ; and He hath charged me to build Him an house in Jerusalem." It is common enough to assume that such religious protestations, as those of all other great conquerors, of a Constantine, of a Napoleon, are the merest political humbug, cynical, insincere. Alas, those who make



such assumptions do but expose their own worthless cynicism! It is perfectly true of course that these conquerors must have used for their own purposes the religious beliefs of the nations whom they had to rule, as they had to use every other form of human thought and prejudice; but it does not therefore follow that they believed less than any of them. Rather they must have believed much more. Of these warriors the religion can have been no mere form of words, or of ceremonies, no mere denial of other men's creeds, but a stern reality. Only he who is conscious of his own worthlessness can be cynical; and these were above all worthy. Their own strength, their own capability, their own duty, were to them the great realities in a world of phantoms and shadows. Between the great thinker and the great conqueror there has ever been, it would almost appear there must ever be, a close connection, a spiritual affinity. Like opposite poles of a magnet they are attracted irresistibly towards one another. For they are both, in a degree above other men, the servants of the Most High.

It has been thought well to add this last thought, as it seems to give a final touch of completion, to round off, as it were, the period of history which we have been considering. But now the question can no longer be postponed, a question which must have perpetually occurred to us as we have traced our idea upward through its history, "Is there any truth in it at all? Is this not an idea just like other ideas? And are not all ideas mere figments of the human brain?" No, emphatically, no. Ideas, like human beings, must prove their worth in the struggle and press of life. And this idea of ours has proved not only its worth, but its

unique worth. As our eyes are cast back down the long vista of history we cannot fail but notice that those men only have lived, those men only have had a grip upon reality, they only have been strong, and great, and inspiring, who have believed in God. Whilst the ever-pouring torrent of life has swept away generation after generation in perplexity, dismay, and horror, they alone have stood firm, have recognised their habitation, have known their Father's face.

To return to the thought with which our investigation was opened. All religious faith is an interpretation of experience ; and as all experiences which human nature undergoes are real, so all religions must be to a certain extent true. We cannot admit that there is any form of faith which is altogether false. The naive imaginings of the nudest savage must contain elements of truth as certainly as the reasoned system of a scientific philosopher must contain them also. But if every creed contains some degree of truth, some must contain it in far fuller proportions than others. Where experiences are most varied and most vivid, where the keenest minds and the most ardent devotion are applied to their explanation, there we may expect to find the greatest measure of truth, the nearest approach to that absolute truth which each of us believes somewhere to exist, but from the full apprehension of which we find ourselves separated by a vast gulf. Vivid experience ! Keen and ardent application ! These are the first conditions for approximating to the truth. Among none of the nations of antiquity are these conditions found to be so amply fulfilled as amongst the Hebrew people. Other nations had surpassed them in military progress, in artistic development, in the arts of civilisation ; but

up to the date at which our investigation ceases no other had approached them either in the wide range of their experience or in the force of mind which was devoted to its elucidation. From that experience, as we have already seen, one grand idea had clearly been produced. Naively felt by the patriarchs in their wanderings, embodied in the national legislation by Moses, branded upon the conscience of the people by the preaching of successive prophets, at the end of Ezekiel's ministry this idea had taken so firm a hold of the heart of every Israelite that from that day to this no fresh additions of experience, however bitter, have been able to shake it. We know what this idea was : that the maker and ruler of all the universe is a God whose character is one of justice, loving mercy, and truth ; furthermore, that He selected His chosen people for His own purposes, watching over them with jealous care, demanding from them a return in obedience to His requirements. This idea then, we are able to assert, was true above all other religious ideas which up to that time had appeared, in containing a greater proportion of absolute truth than any of these others. In further investigations into the history of the chosen people, and of the other civilised nations of the old world, it would be possible to learn how, as experience widened, this idea was further enriched, swelling out into a greater volume of truth than any of the prophets had compassed in their mind. But for the present our task is over. We must leave the people of Israel in their exile on the Babylonian plains, contented if some interest has been aroused in their vicissitudes, above all contented if any readers are sent with renewed care to study for themselves that Book which contains the record of the chosen people.

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PRINTED BY  
W. HEFFER & SONS LTD.,  
104, HILLS ROAD,  
CAMBRIDGE.







